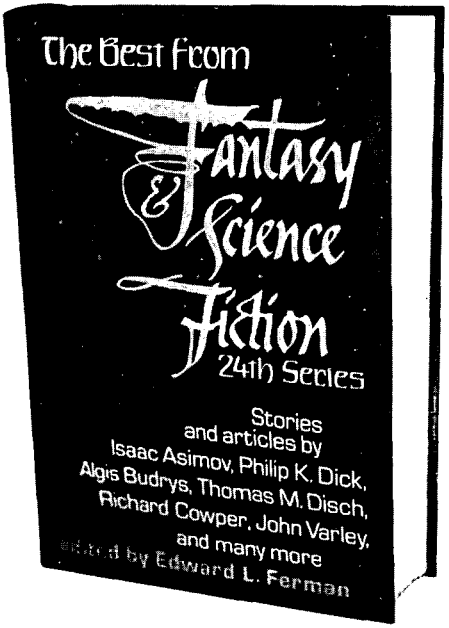
"Together, these volumes comprise a comprehensive postwar library of superior SF and fantasy."

—Neil Barron, *Anatomy of Wonder, A Critical Guide to Science Fiction*

"A new volume in this long-continuing series is always welcome. In the last decade, *Fantasy & Science Fiction* has offered the best combination of innovative writing and high standards of any of the major SF magazines."

—*The Booklist*, American Library Association


The Best From
Fantasy & Science Fiction
24th Series
Stories and articles by Isaac Asimov, Philip K. Dick, Algis Budrys, Thomas M. Disch, Richard Cowper, John Varley, and many more
Edited by Edward L. Ferman

TWELVE exceptional stories from 1979-1981, including "Window," by Bob Leman, "The Fire When It Comes," by Parke Godwin, "Spidersong," by Susan Petrey, "The Brave Little Toaster," by Thomas M. Disch, plus others by John Varley, Neal Barrett, Michael Shea, Eric Norden, Richard Cowper, Philip K. Dick and Lisa Tuttle. Also: articles by Isaac Asimov, Algis Budrys and Baird Searles.

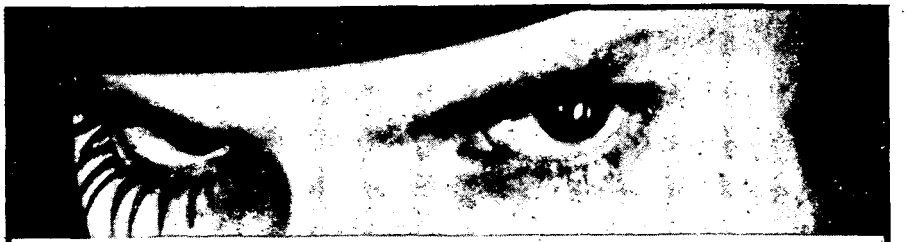
THE BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION
24th Series **Edited by Edward L. Ferman**

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS / A MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION BOOK

100 copies only of this hardcover edition have been signed by the editor — $14.95 includes postage and handling

MERCURY PRESS, Inc., P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753

LOOKED TO WIN
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"Fascinating and rewarding."

—ROBERT BLOCH, author of *Psycho**

*"If you've never seen them on the screen, reading the stories of these classic films is the next best thing. If you *have* seen them, then reading the stories *behind* the stories is even more absorbing."

"Detailed and most interesting comments and intelligent analysis. **Will do much to establish science fiction as both a literary and prophetic art form."**—IB MELCHIOR, screenwriter for *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*

TWENTY ALL-TIME GREAT SCIENCE FICTION FILMS

by KENNETH VON GUNDEN and STUART H. STOCK

150 photos. Size 8½"x11". An Arlington House Book. Distributed by CROWN PUBLISHERS, INC. $19.95, now at your bookstore, or use coupon to order.

CROWN PUBLISHERS, Dept. 954, 34 Engelhard Ave., Avenel, N.J. 07001

Please send me TWENTY ALL-TIME GREAT SCIENCE FICTION FILMS. I enclose my check or money order for $19.95 plus $1.40 postage and handling charge. If I wish, I may return the book postpaid within ten days for full refund.

Name_____

Address _____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

N.Y. and N.J. residents, add sales tax.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy & Science Fiction

Including VENTURE SCIENCE FICTION

NOVEMBER • 34th Year of Publication

NOVELLA

TO LEAVE A MARK	5	**Kim Stanley Robinson**

SHORT STORIES

THE ART OF THE SNEEZE	63	**James Blish**
SHAKESPEARE MCMLXXXV	65	**Bill Pronzini and Barry N. Malzberg**
THE SMILE THAT LOSES	70	**Isaac Asimov**
THE SHANNON MERROW	78	**Cooper McLaughlin**
SERVICE FOR THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD	96	**Connie Willis**
THE HOPPY PRINCE	111	**John Morressy**
THE LETTER	128	**Andrew Weiner**
ELF HILL	151	**Joanna Russ**

DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS	55	**Algis Budrys**
FILMS: Khan-founded	93	**Baird Searles**
SCIENCE: A Difference of an "E"	140	**Isaac Asimov**

CARTOONS: JOSEPH FARRIS (77), JOSEPH DAWES (92), NURIT KARLIN (110)

COVER BY DANIEL BUCKLEY FOR "TO LEAVE A MARK"

EDWARD L. FERMAN, Editor & Publisher — ISAAC ASIMOV, Science Columnist
DALE FARRELL, Circulation Manager — AUDREY FERMAN, Business Manager
Assistant Editors: ANNE JORDAN, BECKY WILLIAMS

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (ISSN: 0024-984X), Volume 63, No. 5, Whole No. 378; Nov. 1982. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.75 per copy. Annual subscription $17.50; $19.50 outside of the U.S. (Canadian subscribers: please remit in U.S. dollars or add 20%.) Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A.

Copyright © 1982 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translations into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is an intelligent and gripping SF novella about a mutiny in space. Its author is one of the fine new voices in the field, with stories in ORBITS 18, 19 and 21 and in UNIVERSE 11. His short story, "Venice Drowned" was a 1981 Nebula award nominee. Mr. Robinson lives in Davis, California, where he is working on a Ph. D. in English.

To Leave A Mark

BY

KIM STANLEY ROBINSON

The first indication I had of the mutiny came as we approached the inner limit of the first asteroid belt. Of course I didn't know what it meant at the time; it was no more than a locked door.

The first belt we call the dud belt, because the asteroids in it are basaltic achondrite, and no use to miners. But we would be among the carbonaceous chondrites soon enough, and one day I went down to the farm to get ready. I fed a bit more light to the algae, for in the following weeks when the boats went out to break up the rocks, there would be a significant oxygen depletion, and we would need more *chlorella* around to help balance the gas exchange. I activated a few more bulbs in the lamp and started fooling with the suspension medium. Biologic life-support systems are my work and play (I am one of the best at it), and since I was making room for more *chlorella*, I once again became interested in the excess biomass problem. Thinking to cut down on surplus algae by suspending it less densely, I walked between long rows of spinach and cabbage to the door of one on the storage rooms at the back of the farm, to get a few more tanks. I turned the handle of the door. It was locked.

"Emma!" called a voice. I looked up. It was Al Nordhoff, one of my assistants.

"Do you know why this door is locked?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I was wondering myself yesterday. I guess there's classified cargo in there. I was told to leave it alone."

"It's our storage room," I said, irritated.

Al shrugged. "Ask Captain Swann about it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I will."

Now Eric Swann and I were old friends, and I was upset that something was going on in my area that he had failed to tell me about. So when I found him on the bridge, I came to the point.

"Eric, how come I'm locked out of one of my own storage rooms? What have you got in there?"

Immediately he blushed as red as his hair, and hung his head. The two rocketry and guidance officers on the bridge looked down at their consoles.

"I can't tell you what's in there, Emma; it's classified. I can't tell anyone until later."

I stared at him. I know I can intimidate people if I look at them hard enough. His blush got deeper, his freckles disappeared in the general redness, his blue eyes gave me a watery stare. But he wasn't going to tell me. I curled my lip at him and left the bridge.

That was the first sign: a locked door, a secret reason for it. I thought to myself, we're taking something for the Committee out to Ceres, perhaps. It was typical of the Mars Corporations Committee to keep secrets. But I didn't jump to any conclusions; merely stayed alert.

The second sign was one I probably would have missed, had I not been alerted by the first. I was walking down the corridor to the dining commons, past the tapestry lounges between the commons and the bedrooms, when I heard voices from a lounge and stopped. Just the voices sounded funny, all whispery and rapid. I recognized John Dancer's voice:

"We can't do anything of the sort until after the rendezvous, and you know it."

"No one will notice," said a woman, perhaps Ilene Breton.

"You hope no one would notice," Dancer replied. "But you can't be sure that Duggins or Nordhoff wouldn't stumble across it. We have to wait on everything until after the rendezvous, you know that."

Then I heard steps across the velcro carpet behind me, and with a start I began to walk again, past the door of the lounge. I looked in; John and Ilene, sure enough, among several others. They all looked up as I appeared in the doorway, and their conversation abruptly died. I stared at them and they stared back, at a loss for speech. I walked on to the dining commons.

A rendezvous in the belt. A group of people in on this event, not the superior officers on the ship, and keeping it a secret from the others. A locked storage hold. ...Things were not falling together for me.

After that I began to see things everywhere. People stopped talking when I walked by. There were meetings late at night, in bedrooms. I walked by the radio room once, and they were sending out a long message through the coding machine. Quite a few of the storage room doors were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ocked, back behind the farm; and ome of the ore holds were locked as vell.

After a few days of this I shook my ead and wondered if I were making it ll up. There were explanations for evrything I had noticed. Shipboard life ends to become cliquish on the best of uns; even though there were only fory of us, divisions would spring up ver the year of an expedition. And hese were troubled times, back on Mars. The consolidation of the various ectors under the central coordination f the Committee was causing a lot of issatisfaction. Sectionalism was rife; ubversive groups were everywhere, upposedly. These facts were enough o explain all the little factions I now oticed on the *Rust Eagle*. And paraoia is one of the most common shipoard disorders ... seeing patterns is asy in such a heavily patterned envionment.

So I began to discount it all. Peraps we were carrying something to eres for the Committee, but that was othing.

Still, there was something about ne atmosphere of the ship in those ays. More people than usual were impy and strained. There were mysteous glances exchanged ... an atmoshere of mystery. But here hindsight ay be influencing me. The facts are hat I want here; this record will help ne to remember these events many ears, perhaps centuries, from now, so must set down the facts, the sharpest spur to the memory.

In any case, the third sign was unmistakable. By this time the sun was nearly between us and Mars, and I went to the radio room to get a last letter off to my fool of a father, in jail temporarily for his loud mouth. Afterwards, I went to the jump tube and was about to fall down to the living quarters when I heard voices floating down the tube from the bridge. Had that been my name? I pulled myself up the rail to the steps that led to the bridge, and stayed there, eavesdropping again. A habit of mine. Once more, John Dancer was speaking.

"Emma Weil is pro-Committee all the way," he said as if arguing the point.

"Even so," said another man, and a couple of voices cut over so that I didn't hear what he said.

"No," Dancer said, interrupting the other voice quickly. "Weil is probably the most important person aboard this ship. We can't talk to her about any of this until Swann says so, and that won't be until after the rendezvous. So you can forget it."

That did it. When it was clear the conversation was over, I hopped back to the jump tube and fell down it, aiding the faint acceleration-gravity with some pulls on the rail. I ticked off in my mind the places Swann would most likely be at that hour, intent on finding him and having a long talk. It is not healthy to believe yourself the focus of a ship-wide conspiracy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

***

I had known Eric Swann for a long, long time.

Before the turn of the century, evevry sector ran its own mining expeditions. Royal Dutch looked for carbonaceous chondrite; Mobil was after the basaltic chondrites in the dud belt; Texas mined the silicate types. Chevron had the project of pulling one of the Amors into a Martian orbit, to make another moon. (This became the moon Amor, which was turned into a detention center; my father lived there.) So each sector had its own asteroid crew, and I got to know the Royal Dutch miners pretty well. Swann was one of the rocketry and guidance officers, and a good friend of my boyfriend Charlie, who was also in R and G. Over the course of many runs in the belt I talked with Swann often, and even after Charlie and I broke up we remained close.

But when the Committee took over the mining operations, all the teams, even the Soviets, were thrown into a common pool — this was in 2213 or 14, I think — and as a consequence I saw all of my friends from Royal Dutch a lot less often. My infrequent assignments with Swann had been cause for celebration, and this present assignment, with him as captain, was going to be, I had thought, a real pleasure.

Now, walking around the ship that I was the most important person on, I was not so sure. But I thought, Swann will tell me what's going on. And if he doesn't know about these matters, then he'd better be told that something funny is going on.

I found him in one of the little window rooms, seated before the thick plasteel separating him from the vacuum. His long legs were crossed in the yoga position, and he hummed softly: meditating, his mind a floating mirror of the changing square of stars.

"Hey, Eric," I said, none too softly.

"Emma," he said dreamily, and stretched his arms like a cat. "Sit down." He showed me a chunk of rock he had in his lap. "Look at this Chantonnay." That's a chondrite that has been shocked into harder rock. "Pretty, isn't it?"

I sat. "Yes," I said. "So what's happening on this trip?"

He blushed. Swann was faster at that than anyone else I ever saw. "Not much. Beyond that I can't say."

"I know that's the official position. But you can tell me here."

He was shaking his head. "I'm going to tell you, but it has to wait a while longer." He looked at me directly. "Don't get angry, Emma."

"But other people know what's going on! A lot of them. And they're talking about *me*." I told him about the things I had noticed and overheard. "Now why should I be the most important person on this ship? That's absurd! And why should they know about whatever it is we're doing, and not me?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Swann looked worried, annoyed. "They don't all know ... You see, your help will be important, essential perhaps—" He stopped, as if he had already said too much. His freckled face twisted as his mouth moved about. Finally he shook his head violently. "You'll just have to wait a few more days, Emma. Trust me, all right? Just trust me and wait."

That was hardly satisfactory, but what could I do? He knew something, but he wasn't going to tell it to me. Tight-lipped, I nodded my good-bye and left.

The mutiny occurred, ironically enough, on my birthday, my eightieth birthday, a few days after my talk with Swann. August 5, 2240.

I woke up thinking, now you are an octogenarian. I got out of bed (deceleration-gee entirely gone, weightless now as we coasted), sponged my face, looked in the mirror. It is a strange experience to look inside your own retinas; down there inside is the one thinking, in that other face ... it seems as if, if you could get the light right, you could see yourself.

I grasped the handholds of my exerciser and worked out for a while, thinking about birthdays. All the birthdays in this new age. I recalled my tenth birthday: my mother took me to the medical station, where I had to drink foul-tasting stuff and submit to tests and a shot — just a quick blast of air on the skin, but it scared me. "You'll appreciate this later," my mom said, with a funny expression. "You won't get sick and weak when you're old. Your immune system will stay strong. You'll live for ever so long, Emma, don't cry."

Yes, yes. Apparently she was right, I thought, looking in the mirror again, where the image seemed to pulse with color under the artificial lights. Very long lives, young at eighty: the triumph of gerontology. As always I wondered what I would do with all the extra years — the extra lives. Would I live to stand free on Martian soil and breathe Martian air?

Thinking these thoughts I left my room, intent on breakfast. The lounges down the hall from the bedrooms were empty, an unusual thing. I walked into the last lounge before the corridor turned, to look out the small window in it, with its view over the bridge.

And there they were. I saw them: two silver rectangles, like asteroids crushed into ingots of the metal they contained. Spaceships!

They were asteroid miners of the PR class, sister ships of our own. I stared at them motionlessly, my heart thudding like a drum, thinking *rendezvous*. The ships grew to the size of decks of cards, very slowly. They were the shape of a card-deck as well, with the mining cranes and drills folded together at their fronts, bridge ceilings just barely bulging from their sides (tiny crescents of light), rocket ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hausts large at their rear, like beads on their sides and front. Brilliant points of light shone from the windows, like the fluorescent spots on the deep-sea fish of Earth. They looked small beside an irregular blue-grey asteroid, against the dead black of space.

I left the lounge slowly. Turned and walked down the corridor—

In the dining common it was bedlam.

I stopped and stared. Of the entire crew of forty-three, at least twenty-five must have been in the commons, shouting and laughing, six or seven singing the Ode to Joy from Beethoven's Ninth, others setting up the drinks table (Ilene staggering under the weight of the big coffee pot), John and Steven and Lanya in a mass hugging and laughing and sobbing, tears in their eyes; and on the video screen, a straight-on camera shot of the two ships, silver dots against a blue-grey asteroid, so that it looked like a die thrown through the vacuum.

They all had known. Every single one of them in the room. I found myself blinking rapidly, embarrassed and angry. Why hadn't I been told? I wiped my eyes and got out of the doorway before I was noticed by someone inside.

Andrew Duggins flew by, pulling himself along the hall rails. His big face was scowling. "Emma!" he said. "Come on," and pulled away. He stopped as I only looked at him. "This is mutiny!" he said, jerking his head in the direction of the commons. "They're taking over the ship, and those others out there too. We've got to try and get a message off to Ceres — to defend ourselves!" With a hard yank he pulled himself away, in the direction of the radio room.

Mutiny. All of the mysterious events I had noticed fell together, into a pattern. A plan to take over the ship. Had Swann been too afraid of the possibility to discuss it?

But there was no time for a detailed analysis. I leaped off the floor, and with a strong pull on the rail was after Duggins.

Outside the radio room there was a full-fledged fight going on. I saw Al Nordhoff striking one of the ship police in the face, Amy Van Danke twisting furiously in the hold of two men, trying to bite one in the throat. Others struggled in the doorway. Shouts and Amy's shrieks filled the air. The fight had that awkward, dangerous quality that all brawls in weightlessness exhibit. A blow that connected (one of Al's vicious kicks to the head of a policeman, for instance) sent both parties spinning across the room....

"Mutiny!" Duggins bellowed, and diving forward crashed into the group in the doorway. His momentum bowled several people into the radio room, and an opening was cleared. I shoved off from the wall and grazed my head on the doorjamb going in.

After that things were blurry, but I was angry — angry that I had been de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ceived, that Swann and the general order of things were being challenged, that friends of mine were being hit — and I swung blindly. I caught one of the policemen on the nose with my fist; his head smacked the wall with a loud thump. The room was crowded, arms and legs were swinging. The radio console itself was crawling with bodies. Duggins was bellowing still and hauling figures away from the mass on the radio controls. Someone got me in a choke hold from behind. I put heel to groin and discovered it was a woman — put elbow in diaphragm and twisted under her arm, nearly strangled. Duggins had cleared the radio and was desparately manipulating the dials. I put a haymaker on the ear of a man trying to pull him away. Screams and spherical droplets of blood filled the air—

Reinforcements arrived. Eric Swann slipped through the doorway, his red hair flying wild, a tranquilizer gun in his hand. Others followed him. Darts whizzed through the air, sounding like arrows. "Mutiny!" I shrieked. "Eric! Mutiny! Mutiny!"

He saw me, pointed his gun at me and shot. I looked at the dart hanging from my forearm.

...The next thing I knew, I was being carried down the jump tube. Getting off it on my floor. I saw Swann's face swimming above me. "Mutiny," I said.

"That's true," Eric replied. "We're going to have to put you under arrest for a few hours." His freckle-face was stretched into a fool's grin.

"Asshole," I muttered. I wanted to run. I could outrun all of them. "I thought you were m'friend."

"I am your friend, Emma. It was just too dangerous to explain. Davydov will tell you all about it when you see him."

Davydov. Davydov? "But he was lost," I muttered, very confused. "He's dead."

Then I was in my bed. "Get some sleep," Swann said. "I'll be back in a few hours." I gave him a look planned to turn him to stone, but he just grinned and I fell asleep in the middle of it, thinking, mutiny....

When I woke up again, Swann was standing by my bed, tilted over in the no-gee so that his head hung over me. "How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Bad." I waved him away and he pushed off into the air above the bed. I rubbed my eyes. "What happened, Swann."

"A mutiny, you've been calling it." He smiled.

"And it's true?"

He nodded.

"But why? Who are you?"

"Did you ever hear of the Mars Starship Association?"

I thought. "A long time ago? One of those secret anti-Committee groups."

We weren't anti-Committee," he said. "We were just a club. An advoc-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

acy group. We wanted the Committee to support research for an interstellar expedition."

"So?"

"So the Committee didn't want to do it. They took us to be part of the anti-Committee movement, so they outlawed us. Jailed the leaders, transferred the members to different sectors. They made us anti-Committee."

"Didn't all that happen a long time ago?" I asked, still disoriented. "What has that got to do with this?"

"We re-grouped," he said. "Secretly. We've existed underground for all these years. This is our coming-out, you might say."

"But why? What good does it do you to take over a few asteroid miners? You aren't planning to use them as starships, are you?" I laughed shortly.

He stared at me without answering, and suddenly I knew that I had guessed it.

I sat up carefully, feeling cold and a touch dizzy. "You must be joking."

"Not at all. We're going to join the *Lermontov* and the *Hidalgo*, and complete their life-support systems' closure."

"Impossible," I breathed, still amazed at the very idea.

"Not impossible," he said patiently. "That's what the MSA has been working on these last sixty years—"

"One of those ships is *Hidalgo?*" I interrupted.

"That's right."

"So Davydov is alive...."

"He certainly is. You knew him, didn't you?"

"Yes." Davydov had been one of the R and G people on *Hidalgo*, when it disappeared in the Achilles group three years before. I had thought him dead....

"There's no way I'll go," I said, after a pause. "You can't kidnap me and drag me along on some insane interstellar attempt—"

"No, no. We're sending *Rust Eagle* back with all the non-MSA people from the three ships."

I let out a long sigh of relief. Yet sudden anguish filled me at the thought of the mess I was suddenly in, of the fanatics who now had control of my life, and I cried out, "Eric, you knew this was going to happen out here — why didn't you arrange to keep me off this flight?"

He looked away from me, pushed himself down to the floor. Red-faced, he said, "I did the opposite, Emma."

"You *what?*"

"There are MSA people in the expedition scheduling office, and—" still staring at the floor— "I told them to arrange for you to be aboard *Rust Eagle* this time."

"But, Swann!" I said, struggling for words. "Why? Why did you do that to me?"

"Well — because, Emma, because you're one of the best life-support systems designers there is on Mars, or anywhere. Everyone knows that, you know that. And even though our sys-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tems designers have got a lot of improvements for the starship, it still has to be installed in those two ships, and made to work. And we have to do it before the Committee police find us ... your help could make the difference, Emma."

"Oh, Swann."

"It could! Look, I knew it was imposing on you, but I thought, if we got you out here ignorant of any of our plans, then you couldn't be held responsible. When you return to Mars you can tell them you didn't know anything about the MSA, that we made you help us. That was why I didn't tell you anything on the way out here, don't you see? And I know you aren't that strong a supporter of the Committee, are you? They're nothing but tyrants. So that if your old friends asked you for help that only you could give, and you couldn't be held culpable, you might help? Even if it was illegal?" He looked at me, his blue eyes grave.

"You're asking for the impossible," I told him. "Your MSA has lost touch with reality. You're talking about travel across *light-years*, for God's sake, and you've got five-year systems to do it with!"

"They can be modified," Swann insisted. "Davydov will explain the whole project when you see him. He wants to talk with you as soon as you'd like to."

"Davydov," I said darkly. "He's the one behind this madness...."

"We're all behind it, Emma. And it isn't mad."

I waved an arm and held my head in my hands, as it was pulsing with all the bad news. "Just leave me alone for a while."

"Sure," he said. "I know it's a lot to take in. Just tell me when you want to see Davydov. He's over on *Hidalgo*.

"I'll tell you," I said, and looked at the wall until he left the room.

I had better tell about Oleg Davydov here, for we were lovers once, and for me the memory of him was marked with pain, and anger, and a sense of loss — loss that no matter how long I lived could not be recouped or forgotten.

I was just out of the University of Mars, working at the Hellas Basin. The old hypothesis explaining why no craters could be seen in this basin from Earth turned out to be correct; the basin is filled with water, frozen on top and covered with a layer of dust. It is a lake, a sea. Of course the area had been settled. But it was a delicate situation, and the use of the water caused ecologic problems. I was set to work with others to solve these problems, and I quickly proved that I was the best among the systems people there. I had a grasp of the whole Hellas set-up that seemed perfectly natural to me, but was (I could see) impressive to others. And I was a good middle-distance runner — so that all in all, I was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a confident youth, perhaps even a bit arrogant.

During my second year there, I met Oleg Davydov. He was staying in Burroughs, the closest city to Hellas, doing some work for the Soviet mining cartel. We met in a restaurant, introduced by a mutual acquaintance.

He was tall and bulky, a handsome man. One of the Soviet blacks, they call them; I guess some of their ancestors came from one of the USSR's satellite countries in Africa. The color had been pretty well watered down over the generations; Davydov had coffee-and-cream-colored skin, for instance. His hair was black and wooly; he had thick lips under a thin, aquiline nose; a heavy beard, shaved so that his lower face was rough; and his eyes were ice blue. they seemed to jump out of his face. so he was a pretty good racial mix. But on Mars, where 99 percent of the population is fish-belly white, as they say, any touch of skin color is very highly valued. It made one look so ... healthy, and vital. This Davydov was really extremely good-looking, a color-delight to the eye. I watched him, then, as we sat on adjacent stools in that Burroughs restaurant, talking, drinking, flirting a little ... watched so closely that I can recall the potted palm and white wall that were behind him, although I don't remember a word we said. It was one of those charmed nights, when both parties are aware of the mutual attraction.

We spent that night together, and the next several nights as well. We visited the first colony in the area, The Can, and marveled at the exhibits in the museum there. We scrambled around the base of the Fluted Cliffs, and spent a night out in a survival tent. I beat him easily in a footrace, and then won a 1500-meter race for him at a Burroughs track. Every hour available to us we spent together, and I fell in love. Oleg was young, witty, arrogant about his many abilities; he was exotically bilingual (a Russian!), affectionate, sensual. We spent a lot of time in bed. I remember, in the dark I could see little more than his teeth when he grinned, and his eyes, which seemed light grey. I loved making love with him .... I remember late dinners together, in Burroughs or out at the station. And innumerable train rides, together or alone, across the sere rust desert between Burroughs and Hellas — sitting by the window looking out at the curved red horizon, feeling happy and excited .... Well, those are the kinds of times that you only live through once. I remember them well.

The arguments. The arguments began quite soon after those first weeks. We were an arrogant pair and didn't know any better. For a long time I didn't realize that our disagreements were particularly serious, for I couldn't imagine anyone arguing with *me* for very long. (Yes, I was that self-important.) But Oleg Davydov did. I can't even remember what we argued about — that period of time, unlike the be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ginning, is a convenient blur in my memory. One time I do remember (of course the rest could be called up as well): I had come into Burroughs on the late train, and we were out eating in a Greek restaurant behind the train station. I was tired, and nervous about our relationship, and sick of Hellas. Hoping to compliment him, I made some comment about how much more fun it would be to be an asteroid miner like he was.

"We aren't doing anything out there," he said in response. "Just making money for the corporations — making a few people on Earth rich, while everything else down there falls apart."

"Well, at least you're out there exploring," I said.

He looked annoyed, an expression I was becoming familiar with. "But we aren't, that's what I'm saying. With our capabilities we could be exploring the whole solar system. We could have stations on the Jovian moons, around Saturn, all the way to Pluto. We *need* a solar watch station on Pluto."

"I wasn't aware of that fact," I said sarcastically.

His pale-blue eyes pierced me. "Of course you weren't. You think it's perfectly all right to continue making money from those stupid asteroids, and nothing more, here at the end of the twenty-second century."

"Well?" I said, annoyed myself by this time. "We're all going to live for a thousand years. So what's your rush? There's time for all of your great projects. Right now we need those asteroids."

"The corporations need them. And the Committee."

"The Committee's just organizing all of our efforts for our own good," I said.

"They just make the trains run on time, eh?" he said, taking a deep swallow from his drink.

"Yes," I said, not understanding what he meant. "Yes, they do."

He shook his head with disgust. "You're an all-American girl, all right. Everything is *oh kay*. Leave the politics to others."

"And you are a true Soviet," I retorted, struggling away from him in our dining booth. "Blaming your problems on the government...."

And we went on from there, senselessly and for no reason but pride and hurt feelings. I remember him making a grim prediction: "They will make a happy American Kremlin up here, and you won't care, as long as your job is secure." But most of what we said was less logical than that.

And a long, miserable week later, a blur of bitter fights, one of those times when you have ruined a relationship though you don't know how, and wish desparately that time could be reversed and the unknown mistake undone, he left. The Soviet mining people wanted him in space again, and he just left, without saying good-bye, though I called his hotel again and again in those last few days. And then I knew

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

— I learned it, in the course of long black walks over the frozen basin, standing alone on that flat plain — that I could be spurned. It was a hard lesson.

In a few years, I was out among the asteroids myself, working for Royal Dutch. I heard stories about Davydov getting in serious trouble with the Soviet mining command, but I didn't pay much attention; it was a matter of pride to ignore anything I heard about him. So I never got the full story of what had happened to him.

Then, many years later — just three years before this mutiny, in fact — the *Hidalgo* disappeared out in the Trojans, breaking radio contact with the famous last words, "Now wait just a minute." No wreckage was ever found. It became a well-known incident, sort of the *Mary Celeste* of Mars. Looking over the list of crew members I saw his name: *Oleg Davydov;* the pain flooded through me again, worse than ever before. It was one of the worst moments of my life. We had parted in anger, he had left me without even saying good-bye — and now, no matter how many years the gerontologists gave me, I would never be able to change those facts, for he was dead. It was very sad.

...Thus, when Eric Swann came to take me across to the *Hidalgo,* to see Davydov again, I did not know exactly how I felt. My heart beat rapidly, I had to strain to make casual, terse conversation with Eric. What would I say to him, or him to me? I didn't have the slightest idea.

Well, he looked very much like he had sixty years before. Perhaps a little heavier; bear-like with his dark hair, his broad shoulders and chest and rump. His ice-blue eyes surveyed me without any visible sign of recognition.

We were on the empty bridge of the *Hidalgo.* At a nod from Davydov, Eric had slipped away down the jump tube. In the breathy vented silence I walked around the bridge slowly, my velcro slippers making little *rip rip rip* noises. My pulse was fast. I discovered that I was still angry at him. And I felt that he had personally deceived me with the news of his death. Or perhaps it was the mutiny....

"You look much the same," he said. The sound of his voice triggered a hundred memories. I looked at him without replying. Finally he said, with a slight, stiff smile, "Has Eric apologized for our kidnapping of you?"

I shook my head.

"I am sorry we shocked you. I hear you fought hard against the takeover. Eric probably explained that we kept you ignorant for your own protection."

So smooth, he was. It just made me mad. He squinted at me, trying to guage my mood. Hard without a voice.

"The truth of the matter is," he went on, "the success of all the MSA's years of effort depend on the creation of a fully closed life-support system in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the starship. I believe our scientists will be able to do it, but Swann has always said your ability with BLS systems is extraordinary, and our scientists agree that you are the best. And they tell me we need your help."

Did I think I would still be vain? I thought. "You're not—" I cleared my throat. "You're not going to get it."

He stared at me, calm and bemused. "You still support the Committee? Even though they have detained your father on Amor, isn't that true?"

"Yes," I said. "But the Committee doesn't have anything to do with this."

"That is the equivalent of saying you still support them. —But enough of that. We need your help. Won't you help us?"

After I didn't reply, he began to stride back and forth, *rip rip rip*. "You know," he said with a nervous glance, "what happened between us occurred a long time ago. We were both children then—"

"We were *not* children," I broke in. "We were free adults, on our own. We were just as responsible for our actions then as we are now."

"All right, you're right," he said, pushing a hand through his hair. "We were not children, admittedly." This was turning out to be more difficult than he had expected. "But it was a long time ago."

"This has nothing to do with that time, anyway."

He looked confused. "Then why won't you help?"

"Because what you are attempting is impossible," I cried. "This is all just a montrous fantasy of yours. You're ignoring the hard cold realities of deep space and leading people to a miserable death out there, all because of some boyish notion of adventure that you've been nursing all these years — for so long that you can't distinguish between fantasy and reality anymore!" I stopped, surprised by my vehemence; Davydov was wide-eyed.

"It's not my idea alone," he said weakly. "Every member of the MSA believes it is possible."

"There have been mass delusions larger than this," I said, "following a fanatic leader."

His eyes glittered angrily. (This effect is the result, I believe, of tensing the forehead muscles, this shifting the layer of water over the eyes....) "I am no fanatic. We started as a group without a leader. I was made leader by the Committee when they tried to destroy us — they wanted to say it was a single person's doing. Like you do. When we reorganized, I was the one everyone knew about. But there are other leaders—"

"You started the reorganization, right?" Somehow I knew this was true. "Started up your little secret society, invented the handshake—"

"The fact that we had to work in secret," he said loudly, and then lowered his voice, "is incidental. A political reality, a fact of our time and place. A lot of work had to be done that the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Committee didn't want done. They wouldn't support us, but that doesn't make the project bad! We're free of political motives, we are an act of cooperation between Soviets and Americans — we try to take humanity to permanent homes outside the solar system, while we still can."

He stopped for breath, staring at me with his swarthy jaws bunched. "Now you," pointedly at me, "completely ignorant of all this, call me a fanatic. Leading fools in a fantasy world." He looked away, out the wide bridge window. "I could have told Swann you would react like this."

My face burned. There we were, exactly as we had left off sixty years before. Furiously I said, "You kidnap me, put my future in great danger, and then call me a fool because I don't fall in with your fantastic schemes. Well you aren't going to get my help, Oleg Davydov, you and your secret club." I moved to the jump tube. "Just tell me when we can take *Rust Eagle* back to Mars. Until then I'll be in my room."

Crossing back over to our ship, Eric didn't dare to say a word to me. Once on *Rust Eagle* I left him and went to my room, hit the desk and nearly cracked my skull on the ceiling. I hate no-gee. I went to the centrifuge and ran, ignoring my complaining knee. Then I went back to my little room to brood and imagine crushing rejoinders to Davydov. Why do all the best lines come to you when the argument is over? What I should have said was ... I know, I know. Only serious brooding will hatch those real crushers.

But why had I fought with him at all, when he was asking for my help?

Later that day Andrew Duggins told me that the people who were not members of the MSA were getting together in the lounge down the hall; I went to see who they were. There were fourteen of us. Among them were Ethel Jurgenson, Ginger Sims, Al Nordhoff, Sandra Starr, Yuri Kopanev, and Olga Dzindzhik. The others had faces I knew but couldn't put names to. We sat about exchanging our experiences during the rendezvous; everyone had been arrested and most only released a few hours before. After these stories were exchanged, we began to discuss possible courses of action, and the bickering began.

I told them what I knew, keeping to myself only the fact that I had been asked for help.

More discussion and arguing.

"We have to find out if there were any prisoners on *Lermontov*."

"Or *Hidalgo*." I thought about that — prisoners for three years.

"We have to act," Duggins said. "We could organize another attack on the radio room. Take it over and put out a call to Mars or Ceres."

"We could slip out of the ship," Al put in. "Patch a little radio onto the high-gain antenna...."

"They're probably listening to us

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right now," Yuri said, and Olga nodded. In the Soviet sector they're used to such practices, or maybe they're just more aware of them.

Anyway, the conversation was killed for a while. We stared at each other. It was a strange situation; prisoners of our shipmates, on what had been our ship. The talk resumed, quieter than before, until disagreements about what to do brought the volume back up. "I don't care if they steal the Committee blind," Yuri said, "and I certainly wouldn't risk myself to stop them."

"What do you think we should do, Weil?" asked Andrew, seeming annoyed at my lack of involvement. He refused to look at Yuri.

"I think we should sit tight, take *Rust Eagle* back to Mars when they let us, and then tell the authorities what we know. To try to stop them here just puts us in danger."

Andrew didn't like that either. "We should resist! Sitting here passively would be helping them, and the Committee will know it." He squinted at me suspiciously. "You're close friends with Swann, aren't you? Didn't he ever tell you what was going on?"

"No," I said, feeling myself blush. They all watched me.

"You're telling us that he just let you walk into this situation without any kind of warning or anything?" Duggins said.

"That's right," I snapped. "You saw me in the radio room, Duggins. I was as surprised as anyone by the mutiny."

But Duggins was unconvinced, and the rest of them looked skeptical as well. They all knew Swann was a considerate person, and it didn't make sense to them that he would have deceived a good friend so.... There was a long, uncomfortable silence. Duggins stood up. "I'll talk to some of you another time," he said, and left the lounge. Suddenly angry, I left too. Looking back at the confused, suspicious people in the lounge, grouped in a disconsolate circle with their colored drink bulbs floating around them, I thought, they looked scared.

When I got to my room, two people were moving into it. A Nadezhda Malkiv, and a Marie-Anne Kotovskaya — both BLSS technicians, both members of the Soviet branch of the MSA. The other two ships were being emptied so that they could be worked on freely, they told me. Nadezhda was 124 years old, a sepcialist in the gas exchange; Marie-Anne was 108, a biologist whose study was the algae and bacteria in the waste-recycling system. They were both from *Lermontov*, which, they said, had been in the asteroid belt nearly four months before the MSA took over, broke radio contact with Mars, and circled around to the rendezvous.

Shocked into a stiff silence by this new development, I went back out in the halls and then to the small lounge around the corner from my room. There I met the leader of the non-MSA people from *Lermontov*, a door man

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

named Ivan Valenski. He had been the Soviet's policeman aboard, until the mutiny. I did not like him; he was a sort of dully furious Soviet bureaucrat, a policeman used to giving orders and being obeyed. He seemed as little impressed by me as I by him: Duggins, I thought, would be more to his taste. They were men scared by so many years of authority that they actively worked for its continuance — to justify their lives up to this point, perhaps. But how was I different from them?

I returned to my room. My new roomates left me the top bunk; the bottom, which I had used as a convenient counter, was occupied by Nadezhda. Marie-Anne planned to sleep in the corner where the walls met the ceiling. their belongings were strapped all over the floor. I talked with them for a while, in English, with some fumbling attempts on my part at Russian. They were nice women, and after the earlier meetings of the day I apppreciated the company of calm, understanding people.

That night Swann came by my room and asked me if I wanted to eat dinner with him. After a moment's thought I agreed.

"I'm glad you aren't still angry with me," he babbled, ingenuous as ever, although I had to remind myself that he had been high in the councils of the MSA for as long as I'd known him.

"Shut up about that and let's go eat," I said. Somewhat subdued, he led the way to the dining commons.

Once there, I looked around at the place, imagining it as the dining commons of the starship. People in neutral-toned one-piece suits walked up to the food counter; there they pushed the buttons for the meal they desired, most of them never looking up at the menu. The foods grown on ship — salads, vegetable drinks, fish or scallops or chicken or rabbit, goat cheese, milk, yoghurt — were supplemented by non-renewable supplies: coffee, tea, bread, beef ... they would run out of those things pretty fast. Then it would be the ship-grown stuff, in enclosed plates, with drinks in bulbs. I watched all the precise forking going on around me; it had a Japanese tea ceremony atmosphere.

"You'll have to keep accelerating," I said. "You can't stay weightless for long, it would kill you."

He smiled. "We've got forty-two cesium tanks." I stared at him. "That's right. This is the biggest theft in history, Emma. At least that's one way to think of it."

"It sure is."

"So, we plan to keep a constant accleration-deceleration pattern, and create half-Mars gravity most of the time." We walked up to the food counter and punched out our orders. Our trays slid out of their slot.

We sat down against the wall away from the mirror wall; I didn't like to eat next to the mirror image of myself. The other three walls of the commons were bright tones of yellow, red, or-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ange, yellow-green; it was autumn on *Rust Eagle.*

"We'll keep up the seasonal colors on board the starship," Swann said as we ate. "Shorten the daylight hours in winter, make it colder, colors all silver and white and black ... I like winter best. The solstice festival and all."

"But it'll just be a game."

He chewed thoughtfully. "I guess."

"Where will you go?"

"Not sure. No, seriously! There's a planetary system around Barnard's Star. That's nine light-years. We'll probably check that out, and at least resupply with water and deuterium, if nothing else."

We ate in silence for a time. At the next table a trio sat excavating their trays, arguing about the hydrogen-fixing capabilities of a certain *Hydrogenomonas eutropha.* Engineering the rebirth of breath. At the next table a young woman reached up to capture an escaping particle of chicken. The diminution of it all!

"How long?" I asked, eating steadily.

Swann's freckle-face took on a calculative look as he chewed. "We could go a hundred, maybe two hundred years...."

"For God's sake, Eric."

"It's only a quarter of our predicted lifetimes. It's not like generations will live and die on the ship. We'll have a past on Mars, and a future on some world that could be more like Earth than Mars is! You act like we're leaving such a natural way of life on Mars. Mars is just a big starship, Emma."

"It's a planet. You can go outside and stand on the ground. Run around."

Swann shoved his tray away, sucked on his drink bulb. "Your five-hundred-year project is the terraforming of Mars," he said. "Ours is the colonization of a planet in another system. What's the big difference?"

"About ten or twenty light-years...."

We finished our drinks in silence. Swann took our trays to the counter and brought back bulbs of coffee.

"Was — is Charlie one of you?"

"Charlie?" He looked at me strangely. "No. He works for the Committee police, didn't you know that?"

I shook my head.

"That's why you don't see him on miners anymore."

"Ah."

He was looking beyond me. "I remember ... about 2212 or 13 ... Charlie dropped by one of our labs with one of his police friends. This was in Tsiolkovski. We had completely infiltrated the Soviet space research labs, and had requisitioned this particular one for some tests — reactor-mass conservation, I think it was. I was visiting to help with some supply problem; they couldn't get all the cesium they wanted. And then there was Charlie and this woman, him saying hello how are you Eric, just dropped by to see how

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you're doing ... And I could not tell whether the woman was his girlfriend and he really was saying hello to me, or whether they were checking out the lab as part of their police work. I showed them all around the lab, told them that we were doing all the work for a Soviet-Arco-Mobil consortium, which of course the records would confirm. I remember walking around talking about old times with him, explaining some of the lab rooms, all the time wondering if both of us were acting, or just me. And I was scared, that somehow our security had broken, and this was the first sign of it...." He shook his head, laughed shortly. "But computer government came through again. They scarcely knew enough to even know there were losses. Computer-bureaucracy — no wonder Earth is falling apart. I have no doubt all of those governments are being stolen blind."

"There's probably a Terran Starship Association that you've never heard about," I said absently.

He laughed. "I wouldn't doubt it." He put his drink-bulb down. "Although we have kept pretty good track of the other underground organizations on Mars. In fact, we chose this particular time for the construction of the starship because we think that the Committee police will be too busy on Mars to make much of a search for us."

"Why is that?"

"The Washington-Lenin Alliance — you've heard of them? — are planning to start a revolt sometime in mid-August, when Mars is farthest from Earth. Some other groups are going to join them. We don't know how big it will get, but there should be enough turmoil to keep the police occupied."

"Great." Oh, no, I thought. Not Mars, too. Please.

Swann moved his bulb around, squared his tray with the table. I continued to eat.

"So you're not going to help us?" he said suddenly.

I shook my head, swallowed. "Nope."

The corners of his mouth tightened. He looked down at the table.

"Does that end your starship attempt?" I asked.

"No," he said. "They'll get very near full closure, I'm sure. It's just — well, on a voyage this long, just the slightest difference in the ship's efficiency will mean a lot. Really a lot. You know that. And I know that if you were to help them the system would end up being more efficient."

"Listen, Eric," I said, and took a deep breath. "What I don't understand is this. You people have been working on this problem for years. You and I have been friends for years, and all during that time you've known that I'm good at life-support systems. So why didn't you ever tell me about it?"

He reddened, chewed his lower lip. "Oh — no reason —"

"*Why*, Eric? Why?"

"Well — at first it was Charlie, you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know. Being your boyfriend and all, lovers tell each other everything, and so—"

"Come on, Eric. We were only lovers for a year or two. You and I have been friends a lot longer than that. Or was it like with Charlie in the lab that day — just acting?"

"No, no," he said emphatically. "Not at all. I wanted to tell you, believe me." He looked up from the table at me. "I just couldn't be sure about you, Emma. I couldn't be sure that you wouldn't tell the Committee about us. You always spoke in favor of the Committee and its policies, whenever the subject came up—"

"I did not!"

He stared at me. "You did. You'd complain about being given too much work and being shunted around from place to place, but you'd always end up saying you were glad the sectors were being coordinated, pulled off each others' throats. And that you were pleased with the life the Committee arranged for you. That's what you *said*, Emma!" He pulled at his cheeks with a hand angrily as I shook my head. "Then when they jailed your father I thought you would change—"

"My father broke the law," I said, thinking about things I had said through the years.

"So are we! See? What if I had told you about us back on Mars, and you had said, you're breaking the law? I couldn't take the chance on my own, although, believe me, I wanted to—"

"Damn you," I said. "Damn Oleg Davydov—"

"How were we to know any better?" he asked, his blue eyes unflinching. "I'm sorry, but you asked me why. We thought you were Committee all the way. I was the only one who thought otherwise, and even with me it was just hope. *We couldn't take the chance.* It was too important, we were trying to accomplish something great—"

"You were pursuing a crackpot scheme that is going to kill sixty people for no reason," I said harshly, standing up as I spoke. "A stupid plan that takes you off into space and leaves you there with no way to colonize a planet even if you made it to one—" I shoved my chair back and walked quickly away, my eyes filling with tears so that it was hard to balance. People were watching me; I had shouted.

I pulled myself furiously through the halls of the living quarters, cursing Swann and Davydov and the entire MSA. He should have known. How could they not have known? I crashed into my room, and happily it was empty. I banged from wall to wall for a time, crying and muttering angrily to myself. Why didn't he know? Why couldn't he tell, the idiot?

For a moment I caught sight of my reflection in my little washstand mirror, and I went over to look in it, floating in mid air. I was so upset I had to squeeze my eyes shut as hard as I could, before I could look in the glass

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at myself: and when I did, I experienced a frightening thing. It seemed that the true three-dimensional world was on the other side of the glass, and that I was looking into it through a window. The person floating in there was looking out. She appeared distraught over something or other...

And in this curious state I had the realization, at the moment of seeing that stranger there, that I was a person like everybody else. That I was known by my actions and words, that my internal universe was unavailable for inspection by others.

They didn't know.

They didn't know, because I never told them. I didn't tell them that I hated the Mars Corporations Committee — yes admit it, I did hate them! — I hated those petty tyrants as much as I hated anything. I hated the way they had treated my foolish father. I hated their lies; that they were taking over power to make a better life on an alien planet, etc., etc. Everyone knew that was a lie. But we kept our mouths shut; talk too much and you might get relocated in Texas. Or on Amor. The members of the MSA had compensated with a stupid plan, to escape to the stars in secret — but they resisted, they stole, they subverted, they disbelieved, they resisted! And me? I didn't even have the guts to tell my friends how I felt. I had thought that cowardice was the norm, and that made it okay. I had thought that resistance necessarily would be like the rash and drunken words of my father, pointless and dangerous. I had been scared of the idea of resistance, and the worst of it was, I had thought that everyone was like me.

I looked at the stranger in the other room through the glass. There was Emma Weil. You couldn't read her mind. She looked plain and grim, skinny, dedicated, unhumorous. what was she thinking? You would never know. she sounded pretty self-satisfied. People who sound self-satisfied usually are. But you would never know for sure. You could look in her eyes as hard as you wanted, for an hour and more: nothing there but empty, weightless black pools....

For a couple of days I sat in my room and did nothing. Then one morning when Nadezhda and Marie-Anne were leaving to work on the starship, I said, "Take me with you."

They looked at each other. "If you like," Nadezhda said.

The two ships had been placed side-by-side. We took our boat into the bay of *Hidalgo*. I followed my roommates back to the farm, ignoring the occasional stare we received from other workers in the halls.

They had already added a few rows of vegetable tanks to the standard farm set-up. The glare of white light from the many lamps made me blink. I trailed beind the two women, listening as they talked to other technicians. Then

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we were off by ourselves, among the big suspension bottles, spotted green and brown, of the algae room.

"*Chlorella pyrenoidosa* with nitrate as its nitrogen source takes ten times less iron out of the nutrient medium than when urea is the nitrogen source, see?" Nadezhda was talking.

"But we have to use that urea somewhere," Marie-Anne said.

"Sure. But I'm worried that the biomass created will eventually become too much to handle."

"Feed it to the goats?"

"But what happens when the nutrient medium is exhausted? No source of iron in the vacuum, you know...."

They had a problem there. There had to be a very close agreement between the photosynthetic coefficient for algae and the respiratory coefficient for the humans and animals; otherwise too mch CO_2 or too much oxygen would build up, depending. One way to deal with this is to provide different sources of nitrogen to different sections of algae, as this will alter the photosynthetic coefficient. But the algae use up their mineral supplies at different rates, depending on their type of nitrogen feed. And over long periods of time this could be significant; to keep up a balanced gas exchange might take more minerals than the rest of the biocenosis would be producing....

"Can't you use urea and ammonia exclusively," I asked them, "and shift amounts of *pyrenoidosa* and *vulgaris* to keep the exchange balanced? That way you'd be using more urea, and avoiding the problem of nitrates."

They looked at each other.

"Well, no," Nadezhda said. "See, look at this — the damn algae grow so fast with urea — too much biomass, we can't use it all."

"What about giving it less light?"

"But that makes for problems with the *vulgaris*," Marie-Anne explained. "Stupid stuff, it either dies or grows wild."

Clearly I was repeating the most obvious solutions. Problem-solving for a biologic life-support system is like a game — one of the very finest intellectual games ever devised, in fact. In many ways it is like chess. Now, Nadezhda and Marie-Anne were certainly grand masters at this game, and they had been working with this particular model, along with the other MSA scientists, for years. So they were a big step ahead of me at that moment, discussing modifications that I had never heard of. But I had never met anybody who had a flair for the game like I did; if it had been chess, I would have been Martian champion, I am sure. When I saw the patient look on Marie-Anne's face as she explained why my suggestion wouldn't work, something snapped in me, and my vague intentions for this visit crystallized.

"All right," I said in a mean tone of voice. "You'd better give me the whole story here, all the details of your model, your new improvements that Swann told me about, everything. If

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you want me to help."

The two women nodded politely, just as if this request were to most ordinary thing in the world; and we got down to it.

So I helped them, yes, I did; and more than ever before the I who thought and felt was distant from the I who did the work on this particular example of the BLSS problem — more than ever the work seemed a game, a giant intricate game, a puzzle that we would look at when we finished; we would stand back to look at it, and admire it, and then we would forget it and go home to dinner. In this frame of mind I was especially inventive and I helped them a lot.

In fact, I'm going to describe the problem in more detail; for who knows what the thousand-year-old Emma might remember or forget, and it would be a shame if she forgot this, for we were at a primitive stage in BLSS design, I reckon, and there were serious obstacles to be attacked.

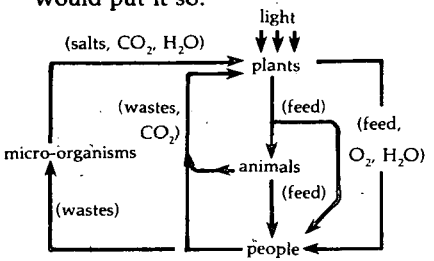
These three ships are *Deimos PRs;* part of a fleet of twenty-seven asteroid miners that were constructed just inside Deimos's orbit, at the turn of the century. They are just over a kilometer long, shaped like a deck of cards; powered by cesium reactor-mass, deuterium-fueled, direct-explosion rockets. The crew of thirty or thirty-five lives in the forward or upper part of the ship, besides the bridge. Below them are the recreational facilities, the various chambers of the farm, and the recycling plants. Below them are the huge mass of the rocket system and the shield system that protects the crew from it. The entire ship is a biogeocenosis; that is, an enclosed ecologic system, combining biologic and technologic methods to create closures. Closure is not complete, of course; it is about 80% complete for a three-year period, tailing off rapidly after that — the actual measure of closure is a coefficient resulting from a compilation of the degress of closure for all the substances being recycled.

Anyway, closure is not complete on these ships, by any means. There are loss-points that have never been satisfactorily solved. But these ships are as close to a closed biologic life-support system as any spaceship ever built.

The BLSS works like this: heat and light are generated by the nuclear reactions, and these provide energy for the photoautotropic plants; algae, especially *chlorella pyrenoidosa* and *chlorella vulgaris,* and higher plants. These plants feed animals and humans, and create oxygen and water. The animals — plankton, crustacea, shelless mollusks, fish, rabbits, chickens, goats — eat the plant wastes that humans don't use, and provide food for the humans. Humans and animals create wastes which sustain microorganisms that mineralize the wastes (to an extent), so that waste-products can be plowed back in to help feed the plants. Gas exchange is kept constant pretty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

simply by the photosynthesis of the algaes, and the respiration of the animals and humans. A simplified drawing would put it so:



This system, supplemented by physiochemical operations to aid the gas exchange and the use of wastes, is nearly closed; a neat, reliable, artificial biogeocenosis.

But there are two major loss points: the incomplete use of human and animal wastes, and water seepage.

Direct use of human waste products as nutrients for plant life is limited by the build-up of chlorine ions not used by plants. Sodium chloride, for instance, is a compound used by human beings as a palatable substance, but it isn't required in equivalent amounts by other components of the system. So the use of algae to mineralize wastes has to be supplemented by physiochemical mineralization; thermal combustion in this case, which results in a small but significant number of nearly useless furnace ash. It's difficult to return these poorly soluble metal oxides into the system.

Another loss point is the very minute disappearances of water. Though water can be filtered out of the air and recaptured in a number of ways, a certain percentage coats the interior of the ship, bonds with various surfaces, pools on the floors and in cracks, and escapes out of the ship's hatches, etc.

Actually, the list of problems could go on forever; and all of the problems impinge on each other, making a large and interconnected web of cause-and-effect, mostly measurable, but sometimes not ... the game. The hardest game.

But as I walked around the modified farm with Nadezhda and Marie-Anne, that first day, it occurred to me that creating a very high degree closure might be possible. A fuel cell to create water by electrolysis, some mutant bacteria to mineralize more wastes ... it might be possible.

But the questions was, once accomplished, would one want to live inside it?

How long could humans live in a spaceship?

How long would they have to?

One morning there was a knock at my door, and I opened it. It was Davydov.

"Yes?" I said.

He ducked his head. "I'm sorry about the way I behaved during our talk last week. It's been so long since I've gotten any criticism of the project, I'd forgotten how to react to it. I guess I lost my temper." Head raised, a shy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little smile: forgive me? Forgive me for kidnapping you and then yelling at you to boot?

"Umm," I said cautiously. "I see."

The smile disappeared, he pulled at his swarthy cheeks with one hand. "Could I perhaps, um, take you on a tour of the starship? Show you what we plan to do?"

I stood thoughtfully for as long as I could, knowing that I would accept the offer, curious to see what they had managed to steal from the Committee. "I suppose," I said.

I saw from the boat's dome, during our crossing, that they had connected the two ships, with thin struts that held them side to side. It was one fat and ungainly looking starship. Its windows gleamed like the luminous patches on ocean-floor fish. We were still in a tiny cluster of asteroids; the big one, I had learned, was Hilda, and around it were several daughter rocks.

It took Davydov several hours to show me what they had. They had: ore-holds full of minerals, medical supplies, some foodstuffs, spices, equipment for planetfall, color-panels and other material for the seasonal changes; a microfiche library of forty million volumes in three hundred languages; an equally vast collection of recorded music, with several each of almost every musical instrument; sports equipment; a lot of movies in English and Russian; a nursery full of toys and games, a room full of computers and computer parts, an observatory with several large telescopes.

During this ever more amazing tour we kept up a running debate, mostly joking. It was actually very enjoyable, although I think the sparring began to bother Davydov after a while. But I couldn't help it. Their efforts had been so thorough, but, still, there was something adolescent about it all, something surreal, all the details logically worked out for an initial proposition that was absurd.

We ended up in the farm, among the splotched algae bottles that made the light green, and the rows of lettuce, and the rich smell of manure. Here I was the guide, and Davydov the tourist. I told him about Nadezhda's algae-suspension tricks.

"I hear you have been helping them."

"Some."

"I appreciate it."

"Oh, don't take it personally...."

He laughed wryly.

And then we were at the back wall of the farm, and it had all been seen. Behind the wall the shield silently vibrated, protecting us all from the nuclear reactions in the rear part of the ship. There was another part of their project that must hold without fail; and the arcane studies that enabled the shield technicians to do it were nearly beyond explanation to those of us who had not committed our lives to the mysteries. It was simply a matter of trust.

"But this is what I want to know," I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said there. "Why do you have to do it this way? People will leave the solar system eventually, right? You don't *need* to do it this way."

He pulled at his face again; I remembered it was a gesture of Swann's, and I thought, this is where Swann got it ... "I don't agree that it is inevitable that humans will leave the solar system," he said. "Nothing is inevitable, there is no such thing as historical determinism. It's people who act, and they choose their acts. We could have built a really adequate starship at any time since the late twentieth century, for instance. But it hasn't been done. And it could be that those two hundred years are a sort of launch window, you know. A launch window that may close soon."

"What do you mean?"

"That the chance may pass. Our ability to do it might disappear. There's a revolution going on on Mars this very minute — Swann told you?"

"Yes."

"So who knows? We may be escaping the end of civilization! Life on Mars could end, and that would damage Earth — they depend on that Mars colony for minerals, as you know. And those Terran governments are just bigger versions of the Committee, doing just as bad a job. They've taken Earth into another of its crisis periods."

"They've gotten through those before," I said, worrying about Mars.

"That doesn't mean much. They never had a population of six billion before. Just the trouble on Mars may be enough to push them over the brink! It's a very delicate artificial ecology, Emma. Much like this little starship of ours. And if it falls apart, then the chance to go to the stars is gone for a long time. Maybe forever. So we're doing it ourselves, right here and now."

"You have a vision—"

"Not just me!"

"I mean all of you."

"Ah. Sorry. English should make that distinction."

"Does Russian?"

"Not really." We laughed.

The force of his ideas had impelled Davydov around the farm; velcro *rips* had accompanied his words as he walked down the rows of vegetables; when he finished, I watched his dark face through the distorting glass of an algae bottle. His ice-blue eyes were the size of eggs, staring at me intently. Suddenly I thought, he wants to convince me of these things. It matters to him what I think. This notion made me flush with pleasure, and it occurred to me that this was how he became the leader of this visionary group. Not by any choice of the Mars Corporations Committee, looking for a scapegoat. He was the leader because he could make people feel that way....

The intercom system crackled. "Oleg?" It was John Dancer's voice, sounding scared. "Oleg, are you hearing me? Respond quickly please."

Davydov hurried to the wall with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the intercom and flicked it on. "What is it, John?"

"Oleg! We need you on the bridge of the *Eagle* quick. Emergency."

"What is it?"

"We've spotted three ships approaching through two-belt central. Looks like police craft."

Davydov looked across at me. "I'll be there right away," he said. He ran between the vegetables to my side. "Looks like trouble on Mars isn't occupying all of them." His voice was still light and joking, but his eyes were grim. "Come along."

So I went with him, across to the bridge of *Rust Eagle*. There were about a dozen people there, a few attending to the *Eagle*, the rest to Davydov and Ilene Breton.

"They're coming in an equilateral triangle pattern," Ilene said. "Simon spotted them by visual check — after he had seen the one, he ran through the police patterns and found the other two. If they don't make any adjustments, they'll come by with one on each side of us and one below."

"How long do we have?" Davydov asked.

"They're decelerating now. They'll pass this sub-group in about three hours."

I have never seen such a grim collection of people in my life. Only the clicks and breath of the ship's functions broke the silence that followed this announcement. I thought of it; everything I had just seen, the fifty years of dangerous work it had taken to get it all here; now it was the prey of a diligent hunter. It could all end in four hours, in capture and imprisonment, return to Mars under guard, in the "starship." Or it could end in sudden death. Those Committee ships carry the arsenals....

"How fast are they moving?" Davydov asked.

Ilene said, "Two or three k's per second."

"They've got a lot of space to search," Swann said hopefully.

"They're bracketing us!" Ilene said. "They'll see us. By radar, heat-scan, metal-scan, visual, radio pickup — somehow they'll see us."

"No more radio transmissions," Davydov said.

"We've already shut down," Ilene replied. Her white pinched face looked impatient; she was waiting for everyone to catch up with her, and help.

They looked at each other.

"We could line up all of our lasers," said Olga Petrov, captain of *Lermontov*. "Fire them up their exhaust vents—" she realized that would have no effect on the shields — "or hit them in the bridges, or the reactor-shield mechanisms."

"Those shields are too well protected," Swann said. But several others were nodding, their mouths pressed tight. They couldn't run, their backs were to the wall; they would fight and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

die. And, I thought, I would die too.

Ilene said, "If we give them any time they'll have a message off, and our position will be revealed. Other police ships would be here in a week."

"Why don't you just hide," I interjected.

They all stared at me. It reminded me of Nadezhda and Marie-Anne.

"We're being bracketed," Swann explained.

"I know. But you aren't at the exact center of the triangle, are you? So if you were to bring these ships right onto the surface of Hilda, or near it, and moved around the top as the bottom ship moved under you, if you see what I mean, then you might stay out of sight the entire time."

"One of the side ships would see us," Ilene said.

"Maybe," I began, but Davydov interrupted: "We could shade to one side of Hilda, and keep Hilda itself between us and one side ship — then maneuver to keep one of the adjacent rocks between us and the other side ship. So Hilda would protect us from two of them, and one of her daughters from the third!"

"If that's possible," Ilene said.

"It won't work," Olga Petrov declared.

"You tell me how they will detect you through an asteroid," I said.

Swann was smiling, crookedly. "We can hide, but we can't run."

"We can't use rockets to move around Hilda," Ilene said practically. "They'd see the exhaust."

We sat thinking about that one. It was like the game of hide-and-seek I had played as a child, on the broad boulder-plains of Syrtis Major.

"You could pull the ships around with lines," I said. "Anchor winches here and there on the surface, and haul us around the rock as the ships go by. That'd give you better control anyway."

They liked that one. "But how will we see them?" Ilene asked. "What if they change directions while we're behind Hilda?"

"We'll put observers on the surface," Davydov said. "They can report with hand signals — relay teams of observers." He thought about it. "Right. Let's go with that." He started pacing around the room, *rip rip rip*. "Let's go, we don't have much time! Ilene, get two boats onto the surface of Hilda. Make sure they take everything they'll need, once there they won't be able to come back up till it's over. Have them place a couple of deadmen as deep as they can in fifteen minutes."

The nice thing about the plan was that most of it was standard mining procedure: closing on a rock, preparing for drilling.... "Have John and the other mining people work out the lines. Oh — tell the boats to use their thrusters only in the boat bays and on the back side of Hilda." A thought struck Davydov, and he started to look in my direction. Thought better of it. "All of the non-MSA people are to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paired with their roommates, where possible, or with someone else if the roommates are busy. I want Duggins, Nordhoff, and Valenski under close surveillance. Keep them in the living quarters and don't tell them what's going on. Emma, you stay here."

I lifted an eyebrow. "I'll miss my nap...."

With a nervous pattering of laughter the group scattered to their various tasks.

Davydov walked over to me. "Thank you, Emma. It's a good plan."

I waved a hand, wondering what I had done — or rather, why I had done it. "The only plan, I think."

"Maybe. But still." His smile and his eyes were bright in his dark face, but he wasn't really thinking about me any more. His jaw was bunched with tension. Ilene called him and he turned and walked over to her.

I sat and waited.

When the lines had been set — it took nearly an hour — I went with Davydov and Olga to the little window room opposite the bridge, which gave a view from the other side of the ship. The lines stretching from us to Hilda (the asteroid was about seven kilometers long, I judged, not an overlarge object to hide three ships behind) were like silver thread, only visible by a sort of act of the imagination. The pulling began and the lines became straight. Off to one side the lines leading to the starship could just be seen. Davydov left to return to the bridge. A long time passed; Hilda came closer. At last the bare, rough blue-grey rock of the asteroid was no more than a hundred meters away. Now the *Eagle's* center rocket was expelling tiny puffs to keep the two objects from coming together — to keep us from falling (drifting, actually) onto the surface. I imagined I could feel the mysterious tug of gravity myself.

Swann came by and asked me to return to the bridge. As I walked up the tube (and now there was an up), I noticed an unusual silence. A lot of systems had been shut down. The three ships had become, to the outer world, inert objects.

Ilene had set up a computer display on the big viewscreen, which indicated our two ships, the outline of the asteroid as seen from our original location, and the three police ships. These were out of our view, and were being located by observers out on the asteroid's surface; people crawling around in hoursuits, hiding behind rocks like the scouts of ancient Earth. The bridge was crowded again.

We waited, watching the green screen with its shifting purple lines and points. The computer people and John Dancer were still programming our maneuvers. The rest of us sat and watched.

"I've got them on visual," came the report from one of the surface observers. "About ten degrees above my horizon, veritcal 95 or a hundred."

"Tell him to point his suit exhaust

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the ground," Davydov said into the mike.

The lines started to pull us around the asteroid. moving at a pretty snappy pace. On the green display screen we stayed near the center, two purple dots; the asteroid's outline shifted down, and the tiny purple circles of the police ships rose slowly toward the outline. If they broached it, they would be in our sky. One of them certainly would. Ilene introduced the small shape of one of the rocks following Hilda onto the screen, the daughter rock that would be between us and that cruiser, for a while at least.

Looking out the bridge's wide plasteel window, we could just see Hilda, curving away from us; the underside of the starship, just above us; and behind it the vacuum sky, star-studded. The events on the computer screen could have been a movie, a war game, abstract art, for we could no more see the police than they could see us. Abstract art; and the esthetic was to keep all the dots within the irregular circle....

The quiet voices kept reporting in for the observers, giving us positions, and Ilene tapped them out accordingly. The little purple dots skipped across the screen.

With the ship below us, it was simple. It would fly by; we would move up and around the asteroid, keeping it between us and them, and it would never see us. With the ship on our right it was the same, except that there wasn't such a big margin; we would remain just under the horizon for the third ship, for a few minutes. That was the bad part — but during that time a daughter rock, no more than two kilometers across, would be floating between us and the third ship. By the time that this ship flew out from behind the daughter rock, we hoped to be over the horizon of Hilda again, and out of sight of all three of them.

We watched the screen. I looked over at Davydov; he stared impassively at the display, a quizzical, resigned look on his face.

The third ship was over Hilda's horizon, behind the daughter rock. Davydov leaned forward. "Station Three, draw us toward you," he said into the mike, overriding the program. He waved aside Ilene's protest. "We've got some room to spare on that side," he said. He concentrated on the screen. "Simon. tell us when you see them," he said into the mike again. I thought of Simon, prone on the surface—

"He says he sees them," came his observer's voice.

"Pull to Station One, as fast as you can," Davydov said.

The little blip of the third ship crawled to the line demarcating the daughter rock, and there it sat, on the line; on our horizon, its detecting instruments just above or below it, who could say? "Pull," Davydov whispered to himself, "*Pull.*" I thought, alarm bells could be going off....

After no more than two minutes, the dot marking the third ship slipped

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back down under the rock's horizon, and then behind Hilda again. Now Hilda protected us from all three of them.

But we might have been visible, there, for that minute.

Simon kept sending us positions, and everyone on the bridge listened with consuming interest.

"They're not slowing," Swann ventured.

....And so they bombed on by, three police ships of my lawful government. I felt as happy as the others acted, and proud of myself. Although, really, they could have caught us in that minute on the horizon. So it hadn't been that great a plan. But it worked.

It had been five hours since the first sighting of them; five very long hours, during which I had had little to do but contemplate my life and its potential end ... the kind of dense thinking that is shortened by, "my whole life passed before my eyes." A tornado of the mind. I was tired.

"We'll stay behind Hilda for a day or so," Davydov said. "Then back to work." He heaved out a breath, grinned at us. "Time to get out of here."

—

When the relieved celebration was over, and I had calmed down, I went into my room and fell into a deep sleep. Just before I woke up, I had a vivid dream:

I was child, on Mars, and we were playing hide-and-seek, as we often did. We were at the station on Syrtis Major, one of those broad desert plains that are strewn with boulders: boulders from the size of basketballs up to the size of a small room, all scattered across the plain in a regular pattern that used to baffle our elders. "There's no way such even distribution could be natural," my father would say, sitting on one of the rocks and staring out at the nearby horizon. "It looks just like a stage set."

But to us children it was perfectly natural. And in the late afternoons, after dinner, we would play hide-and-seek. In my dream it was near sunset, one of the dust sunsets, when you could look straight at the little red sun, and the sky was ribbed with pink bands of dust, and the rust-colored plain was marked by long black shadows, one for each rock. I was hiding behind a spherical boulder about waist-high, crouched down, watching the other kids make their dashes for home base. Home base was a long way away. I could see the wind, picking up swirls of sand, but in my suit I couldn't feel it. There were giggles and quick breathing on the radio band, which was turned down so that the sounds were all very quiet. My mike was turned off. The person who was it gave up; there were too many boulders, too many shadows. "Olly olly oxen, free free free," she called, singing the phrase in a quavering voice. "Olly olly oxen, free free free."

But I couldn't come in. There was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another it; something I didn't recognize, a tall dark thing like one of the long black shadows come alive. It was nearly sunset, the ruby sun was touching the old crater wall to the west. I was hiding in earnest. I could just dare to put one eye over the rock, to see the dark shape move around, looking behind one rock after the other. Where was home base? The radio transmitter hissed. No one called. The dark thing that was it was moving toward my hiding pace, checking boulder after boulder. The shadow of the crater wall was stretching across the plain, blacking out everything....

I shifted against the bed, half woke for a moment. Then my father had me by the hand. We were free of suits, under the dome. I was younger, about seven. We were walking across the baseball diamond. Dad had our gloves and the ball, one of the kid's softballs that wouldn't go very far when you hit it. "When I was your age and played baseball," Dad told me, "the field was about the same size as this one."

"This one's little."

"On Mars it is. But on Earth even the grown-up ball wouldn't go very far when you hit them."

"Because of gravity." Whatever that meant.

"Right. The Earth pulls harder." He gave me my glove and I stood behind home plate. He stood on the pitcher's mound and we threw the ball back and forth. "That pitcher really got you yesterday."

"Yeah. Right on my kneecap."

Dad grinned. "I saw how you hung in there the next time you got up. I like that." He caught and threw. "But why did you try to steal third when you had just been hit on the knee?"

"I don't know."

"You were out by a mile." He fielded a low one. "And Sandy had just bunted and got out to get you to second. And once you're on second you're in scoring position."

"I know," I said. "I just took off when I got a good lead."

"You sure did." Dad was grinning, he threw a hard one at me. "That's my Emma. You're awful fast. You could probably steal third, if you worked hard enough. Sure. We work hard at it, you could be a real speedster...."

And then I was running, across the open desert, the hard baked oxidized sand of south Syrtis. In my dream the desert was like the Lazuli Canyon, filled with breathable air; I ran barefoot, in my gym shorts and shirt. In Mars's gentle grasp I bounded forward, arms making a sort of swimming motion, as my father had taught me. No one had really worked on running in Martian gravity, I was working it out for myself, with Dad's help. I was in some sort of race, far ahead of the others, pushing off the warm gritty sand with great shoves of my thighs, feeling the thin chill air rush by. I could hear my father's voice: "Run, Emma, run!" And I ran across that red desert, free and powerful, faster and faster, feeling like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I could run over the horizon before me and on forever, all the way around the planet.

Nadezhda and Marie-Anne woke me coming through the door, talking of excess biomass. My heart was thumping, my skin was damp. In my mind I still heard the command: "Run!"

They began working incessantly to complete the starship. Nadezhda and Marie-Anne stayed up to all hours in our room pouring over programs and program results. It was laughable, really; having missed them, the Committee police weren't likely to pass that way again. Nevertheless they hurried, and my roommates grew more and more serious as days passed. "...degree of closure of any substance is established by its rate of consumption in the system, E, and the rate of flow in incomplete closure, e,". Nadezhda would mutter, as if praying, glancing balefully at me as I refused to work with them for more than several hours a day. The lights focused on the little desk, Marie-Anne hunched over the computer screen, copying down figures.... "The substance's closure coefficient K is determined by K equals I minus e over E...."

They could not get that coefficient high enough, do what they might. I tried hard to figure out something myself. But perfect closure is not natural; it doesn't exist anywhere. For the starship, the leaks would be in waste recycling. They couldn't deal with the accumulation of chorides, or the accumulation of humic matter in the algal reactors. And they wouldn't be able to completely recycle corpuses, either animal or human. Certain minerals ... if only they could be re-introduced into the system, made useful to something which would transform them into something back in the mainstream in the cycle.... So we worked, for hours and hours, juggling the processes, trying to make a tail-in-mouth snake that would roll across the universe.

One night when they were gone I typed out the full program and filled in estimated figures of my own, to find the point where the accumulations would imbalance the system enough to break it down. I got about seventy years.

An impressive achievement, given what they were given; but the universe is a big place, and they needed to do better.

One day while thinking about this problem of closure, a week or more after the fly-by, Andrew Duggins, Al Nordhoff, and Valenski stopped me in the hall. Duggins looked fat and unhealthy, as if the situation were taking its toll on him.

"We hear that you helped the mutineers evade a Committee police fleet that came near here," he accused.

"Who told you that?" I said.

"It's the talk of the ship," he said angrily.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Among whom?" I asked.

"That doesn't matter," Valenski said in his clipped, accented English. "The question is, did Committee police pass us by while we three were incarcerated last Friday?"

"Yes, they did."

"And you were instrumental in making the plans to hide from them?"

I considered it. Well, I had done it; and I wanted to be known for what I was. I stared Valenski in the eye. "You could say that, yes."

"You helped them escape capture!" Duggins burst out. "We could have been free by now."

"I doubt it," I said. "These people would have resisted. The police would have blown us all to dust. I saved your lives, probably."

"The point is," Valenski said, "you aided the mutineers."

"You've been helping them all along," Duggins said. The animosity flowing from him was almost tangible, and I couldn't understand it. "Your part in the attack on the radio room was a sham, wasn't it? Designed to get you into our confidence. It was you who told them about our plans, and now you're *helping* them."

I refrained from pointing out the lack of logic in his indictment. As I said, paranoia is common. "What do you think, Al?" I said flippantly.

"I think you're a traitor," quiet Al Nordhoff said, and I felt it.

"When we return to Mars," Valenski pronounced, "your behavior will have to be reported. And you will have no part in commanding the return flight. If you return."

"I'm going back to Mars," I said firmly, still shaken by Al's words.

"Are you?" Duggins sneered. "Are you sure you're going to be able to jump out of Oleg Davydov's bed when the time comes?"

"Andrew," I heard Al protest; by that time I was taking an alternate route to the dining commons, walking fast, *rip rip rip*.

"Damned treacherous *woman*," Duggins shouted after me. His two companions were remonstrating with him as I turned a corner and hurried out of earshot.

Upset by this confrontation, aware of the pressures that were steadily mounting on me from all sides (when would I be compressed to a new substance, I wondered?), I wandered through the complex lounges outside the dining area. The autumn colors were getting closer to winter: torpid browns, more silver and white. In the tapestry gallery, among the complex wall-hangings, there was a bulletin screen filled with messages and games and jokes. I stopped before it, and a sentence struck my eye: "Only under the stresses of total social emergencies do the effectively adequate alternative technical strategies synergetically emerge." Jeez, I thought, what prose artist penned that? I looked down — the ascription was to one Buckminster Fuller. The quote continued: "Here we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

witness mind over matter and humanity's escape from the limitations of his indentity with some circumscribed geographical locality." That was for sure.

Part of the bulletin screen was reserved for suggestions for the name of the starship. Anyone could pick his color and typeface, and tap a name onto the space on the screen. It was getting crowded. Most of them were dull: *First One, The Starship.* Others were better. There were classical allusions, of course: *The Ark, Santa Maria, Kon Tiki III, Because It's There.* The names of the two halves of the ship had been joined — *Lerdalgo, Himontov* — but I doubted they would be chosen. In the center of the screen was the suggestion rumored to be Davydov's: *Anicarus.* I liked that one. Also *Transplutionia,* which sounded like the Vampires of Outer Space. About a third of the names were in the Cyrillic alphabet, which I can barely transliterate; and the names would have been Russian, anyway. They all looked good, though.

Looking at the names I thought about all that had happened, about Davydov, Swann and Breton, Duggins and Valenski. I would be in trouble if I returned to Mars ... if I returned? *When* I returned! Seized by undirected anger, I was suddenly inspired to add a name to the screen. In big orange letters I typed out, just below Davydov's suggestion, THE SHIP OF FOOLS. The ship of fools. How perfect. We would make an illustration for the allegory, with me large among the foreground characters. It made me laugh, and feeling better, although I knew that was illogical, I went to eat.

But the next day the feeling of pressure returned. I felt like a chunk of chondrite, being transformed to Chantonnay. My life's course had been bent by this event, and there was no way to straighten it out; all my choices lay in a new direction, where eventual disaster seemed more and more likely. This sense of pressure became unbearable, and I went to the centrifuge to run. It felt good to get in the gravity and run like a hamster in a wheel, like a creature without choices.

So I was running. The floor of the centrifuge was made of curved wooden planking, the walls and ceiling were white, dotted by numbered red circles to tell runners where they were. There were unmarked, informal lanes: slow to the right, fast to the left. Usually I just went to the left wall and started running, looking at the planks as they passed under me.

This time I heard the thump of feet directly behind me, and I moved over. It was Davydov. He drew even with me.

"Mind if I run with you?"

I shook my head, although I don't like running with others. We ran side by side for a few revolutions.

"Do you always run this fast?" he said.

Now when I run, I am doing a middle-distance workout, and the point is to get up to about 90% max-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imum pulse rate and keep it there, for up to twenty or thirty minutes. It was working to the limit. So when Davydov asked me his question, I was about to collapse. Nevertheless, I said, "Only way to go."

He grunted. We ran on. His breathing quickened.

"You about ready to take off?" I asked.

"Yeah. A few days. I think."

"Going to make closure?"

He glanced at me briefly; he knew that I knew that they weren't. Then he looked back at the floor, thinking about it.

"No," he said. A few strides. "Water loss. Waste build-up. Not enough fuel."

"How long can you go?"

"Eighty — eighty years."

I smiled a moment, pleased with the accuracy of my own calculations. They should have had me from the start, I thought. I said, "Doesn't that worry you?"

Again he watched the floor. We took quite a few strides.

"Yes," he expelled suddenly. A slight stumble to mark the admission. "Yes, I'm worried." Several strides. "I've got to. Stop now. Join me? In the game room?"

"In a few minutes." He slowed and dropped back to the right. I waved a hand without turning and started to run freely again, thinking about the look on his face and a sense of release when he said yes, I'm worried.

After six thousand meters I climbed up to the hub and got out of the centrifuge, took a quick sponge-bath. I walked down to the game room, feeling much better, tired and strong in the no-gee.

Davydov was over in an isolated corner of the game room, sitting at a table for two, staring out the tiny port in the wall beside him. It seemed that the seasons were accelerating aboard our ship; the room was somber, brown and thunderhead blue and silver. I sat down beside him and we stared at the little square of stars. He got me a bulb of milk. His big dark face was lined with concern, and he didn't meet my gaze.

"Eighty years isn't very long," I observed.

"No. It could be enough, if we're lucky."

"But it's not as much as you hoped for."

"No." His mouth was set. "Not at all."

"What will you do?"

He didn't answer. He took sips from his bulb, pulled at his rough face. I had never seen such an expression of uncertainity on his face before. I thought of it: he had committed much of his long life to the idea of the starship and its voyage. Suddenly the idea was realized! — and it was not as perfect as the idea had been; thus more dangerous. And he was filled with doubts. He saw that he could be leading people to death, now; I saw it in his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expression. That transition, from idea to reality, had had its usual effect on him — it had clarified the possibility of failure, heightened his sense of danger, frightened him.

"You could just take it back," I said. "You could fly it into an Earth orbit and tell the Terrans what you've done and why. You could advocate a real starship, the Committee wouldn't dare attack you in Earth space."

He was shaking his head. "They wouldn't have to. The American and Soviet military would do it for them. Board us and take us down and ask the Committee what they'd like done with us."

"Not if the Committee's been overthrown by this revolt you've told me of."

"I doubt that will happen. The Committee controls too much."

"Well, you've got eighty years — you could play hide-and-seek in the system, radio Earth and Mars and tell them about themselves, avoid capture until you become a *cause celebre* and no one will dare harm you—"

Again he was shaking his head. "They'd just hunt us down. That isn't what we did all this for."

"But eighty years isn't long enough for interstellar flight!"

"Yes, yes, it is—"

"Oleg," I said. "You can't say it's enough just because it might be enough to get you to one of the nearest stars. You're going to have to search for a habitable planet, and eighty years isn't enough time for that."

He stared out the window, took several sips from his bulb. "But during that time,'" he said, "we'll improve the life-support system. And that will give us more time."

"I don't know how you can say that."

"We've got a lot of equipment and parts with us, and one of the finest system-design teams ever assembled. If they're good enough, then we'll have all the time we'll need."

I stared at him. "That's a big if."

He nodded, the worried expression still on his face. "I know it is. I just hope that the systems team is the best one it could possibly be."

We sat in silence for a while longer, and then Ilene's voice called Davydov back to some business or other, and I was left to brood over the meaning of that last statement of his. It wasn't all that obscure, and I gritted my teeth as I felt the pressure mount.

Later that day, still feeling the slow progress of compression and transformation, I ate dinner with Swann. He was in an excellent mood, and talked at length about improvements made in the R and G of the starship. They're going to have to switch from acceleration to deceleration quite a few times; now they'll be able to do it using less fuel.

"What's with you?" he asked, when he noticed how much of the conversation he was supplying.

"How are you going to get out of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the solar system?" I replied. "Without the Committee police seeing your exhaust?"

"We're going to keep something between us and them the whole time our rockets are firing. At first we'll have the sun between us and Mars, then we'll shut down until we meet with Saturn. Orbit it for a while, then coast out to Pluto." He looked at me oddly. "That's only a few open bursts — but you'll keep this all a secret?"

"Unless they drug it out of me," I said morosely. "You'd probably better not tell me any more."

"What's this?"

"Duggins and Valenski plan to tell the Committee that I collaborated with you. I may end up on Amor, for all I know."

"Oh, my. Oh, Emma — you'll just have to deny their accusations. Most of the people returning will support you."

"Maybe. It's going to be a mess."

"Here. I'm going to get a liter of wine." They made a good white wine on *Rust Eagle*, with only a few vines. While he got it I tried to remember whether the starship would have any grapevines. Probably not. Too much waste.

I proceeded to drink most of the wine, without responding much to Swann's conversation. After dinner we went down to our rooms. In front of my door Eric kissed me, and almost angrily I kissed back, hard. Drunk.... "Let's go to my room," he said, and I agreed, surprising myself. We went, and it never occurred to me, then, to wonder if this was exactly the man I had in mind to go to bed with.... In his room we turned off the lights and undressed as we floated about kissing. Making love was the usual clumsy, pleasant affair in the weightlessness; holding onto the bed, moving slowly at unfortunate moments, using the velcro straps. I lost myself in the sensations, marveling once again at how open lovers become to one another; I felt a surge of affection for this friend of mine, this cheerful and gentle man, this crazy exile fleeing humanity. How to think of him? What was he fleeing, after all, but the turmoil and repression on Mars, the absolute madness on Earth, our home world, our home — fleeing all the hatred and war. If only they all understood, that everyone is as human as your lover is.... Maybe on the starship they would remember it, I thought disconsolately.

"Emma," he said, as we floated quietly in our embrace. "Emma?"

"Yes."

"Please come with us."

..."Oh, Eric."

"Please, Emma. We need you. It'll be a good life, one of the great human lives. And I want you along. It will make all the difference for me—"

"Eric," I said.

"Yes?"

"I want to live on Mars. That's my home."

"But—" He stopped, sighed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We floated, and for once the weightlessness felt like gravity; gravity pressing from every direction. Tears leaked out of my eyes.

This was my chance to join humanity's greatest voyage. I wished I hadn't drunk so much. "I want to go back to my room," I whispered. I switched on the desk lamp, retrieved my clothes from the air, avoided Eric's sad gaze. I kissed him before I left.

"Think about it?" he said.

"Oh, I will," I said. "I will...."

In the last few days they gutted the *Rust Eagle*, leaving it just able to get home. Nadezhda and Marie-Anne looked haggard. One day I helped them get their belongings together; they were moving to the starship. Marie-Anne dabbed at her eyes and embraced me, and the three of us stood there, a triad of sane femininity in a crazy world ... but they left.

The bare empty room was very oppressive. I left it and floated through the ship, disdaining the velcro-and-balance routine, making lazy fingertip-turns to negotiate the frequent bends. I flew as if in a dream, touring the ship, refusing to acknowledge the few people I passed. It was nighttime; the halls were dimmed, just guidance lights on. Occasional clumps of people sat in the lounges, talking softly, drink-bulbs hovering above them like *djinn*-jars. They didn't look up as I passed.

Through the quiet living quarters (in open doors people packed their goods to cross to the starship); up to the huge, dark bays at the top, amongst the mining equipment that was left, the waldoes like monsters or sad mangled robots, half-seen in the shadows they cast; down the long jump tube back to the power station, where it was bright, humming empty. And then back up the tube to the bridge, where I stood before the broad window and looked across at the thing.

Well, I thought, there it is. I could go on the first flight to the stars. I felt that it somehow should have been more momentous, an invitation filled with ceremony: interviews by large committees, batteries of tests, acceptance by telegram, the attention of two worlds. Instead, two miners fused together by insubordinated friends; and I invited by these friends, including two men I had cared about for years. It didn't seem right. I recalled all the stories in literature about interstellar flight; all the deranged, degenerate, incestuous little societies. Yet this expedition, its members living through and beyond the voyage, would not turn out like that. Or would it? Maybe the dream of the savannah would drive them mad. Suddenly I was acutely conscious of the fact that I was in a little bulb of air like an extended spacesuit; I was in a submarine, millions of fathoms deep in a vacuum ocean.

No, I could not go with them. They might be able to do it — if I went,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nadezhda and I could keep that life-support system working, surely — but I could not go. I needed to be able to walk on ground, bare Mars ground.

The vision of the books struck me again; I saw the double ship floating out there empty, light-years away, the skeleton of a failed idea.

I could prevent them from leaving. The thought made me glance furtively at the silent figures sitting at the ship's controls. They ignored me.

I couldn't do anything to the starship. But if I disabled *Rust Eagle*, they would be forced to — to what? They wouldn't kill us, and so perhaps all would be saved.... There were key codes in Davydov's cabin that would open the locks in the deuterium holds.

Without really thinking about it, I drifted out of the bridge, and still floating about like a disembodied spirit, I came to Davydov's room off in a corner bend of the upper hall. The door was about a quarter open. It was light inside.

I tapped at the door, holding the jamb beside it for support. No reply. I stuck my head in and looked around. Empty? A single desk lamp lit the room. I was about to put my feet to the velcro carpet, but thought better of it — too noisy. I pushed the door open a little farther and slipped in.

He was asleep. He had put two chairs together, and was draped across them head and shoulders on one, knees on the other. His mouth hung open; he breathed easily. Under the lamp I noticed that his hair was the same kinked texture as the velcro carpet below him.

For a long time I coasted through the air, watching his dark face, darker still in the shadows. He looked so ordinary.

On the desk, in the lamp's gleam under a clamp, were a few scattered papers. I was already intruding; I tiptoed off a wall and floated over to look at them.

They were diagrams, several versions of the same thing. Under one sheet lay a compass and straight-edge. The diagrams were all circular, or near it: a construction made with several arcs of the compass, that resulted in a circle flattened slightly on one side. Around this faint circumference were little rectangles, set at different angles, blackened by pencil. I looked at a faint scrawl on one of the sheets: *Pluto*. And on scratch paper, written under a long series of numbers:

"Something to leave a mark on the world, Something to show we were here at all—" The penciling was smeared as if by the back of a hand. The final dash trailed off across the page.

I stared at the little black rectangles for a long time, looking over at Davydov once or twice. A kind of marker, to be erected on Pluto before they left the solar system forever? "Something to show we were here at all...." Floating in that dark room, no sound but the airy *hoooo* of the vents, the desolation began to fill me, the vacuum.

We all will die. It was the first time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in my life I had had that thought and really believed it. The postponements we have devised make it easier not to think of; it might be a millennium away. But it will come. The diagrams below me seemed like circles of gravestones. Designs for a tomb. That's how we show we were here; that's all we can do.

I floated over the sleeping man, stretched out horizontally above him. Even the exile wants to be remembered. I wished I were a succubus, and could possess him without his full awakening, without his becoming conscious and human. He breathed on. With a convulsive shudder I drifted away, touched off a wall to the door, slipped out and down the hall, my plan to disable the *Eagle* entirely forgotten. It was not my part to interfere with anyone else's method of dying.

Soon they all would be gone.

Back in my room I drifted off into a troubled sleep. Once I half awoke and found myself wedged in a corner, lying upright beside the bed; I groped about until my hand hit a velcro strap, stuck it against the stick-strips on either side of me, and fell asleep again. It was that sort of sleep in which you wake every hour and think to yourself that you have not been sleeping at all; you can remember dreams that are like reflections, daytime thinking slightly warped. I slept and slept; sleep-floated down to the toilet and back, to fall asleep yet again. I didn't want to wake up; I was tired.

Many hours later I was awakened by a knock on the door. I burst out of my velcro strapping, landed on the far wall. I collected myself and answered the door. It was Davydov. I blinked, my mind confusing this moment with the last time I had seen him.

"We'd like everybody to come over to the starship for a final meeting. It'll be in a couple of hours."

"Is it time?" I said.

He nodded. "Would you like to go over there with me? I'm crossing in just a little while."

"Uh. Sure. Let me get myself together."

After I had cleaned up, I joined him in the boat bay, and we crossed the space separating the two ships. The starship looked just the same, a work in progress.

Inside *Lermontov* it was emptier than I remembered. Davydov took me through the rough tunnel of the lock-tube connecting the two ships, and showed me the living quarters of *Hidalgo;* walls had been knocked out, and all of the bedrooms were twice as big as before. The hospital had been extended, mostly for storage space. We passed stacks of plastic boxes, one nearly blocking a hallway. "Still moving in," Davydov said. He seemed full of quiet pride, the captain of a bright new spaceship, all of his doubts vanished in the night while mine had accumulated.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm tired," I complained.

We returned to the bridge of *Lermontov*. There was still some time before the meeting. After that, those of us returning would cross to *Rust Eagle*. It was time for the parting.

They were going to leave *Rust Eagle* one boat, and just enough fuel to accelerate to about fifty km/sec and decelerate again — that meant a weightless coast around the sun, for most of the return, in fact. I cursed when Davydov told me that.

"I'm sorry about what we've done to you," he said from the window. "All the impositions — the danger we've put you in."

"Eh," I said.

He stayed with his back to me. "Everything should be calm by the time you get back."

"Hope so." I didn't want to think of it. We deserved to return to calmness.

"I'm sorry you're not coming with us, Emma."

That woke me up. I looked at his back. "Why is that?"

"You ... were the last outsider. And I hadn't talked with any outsiders for years. If ... if you had decided to join us, it would have meant a lot to me."

"You wouldn't have to feel guilty about sending me back to whatever's happening on Mars," I said cruelly.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I suppose that's true. And — and I wouldn't have to consider what happened between us so long ago finished...." Finally he turned and faced me, rip-ripped over to me. "I would have enjoyed your company," he said slowly.

"And if I were going," I said, "I would have enjoyed your company too. But I'm not going." I clung to that.

"I know." He looked away, searching for words, it seemed. "Your approval had become important to me."

Wearily I said, "Not all that important."

He winced. I watched his mouth tighten unhappily. Somewhere in me a tide turned, my mood began to lighten. After a long silence I stood up carefully (I had been leaning on the navigator's chair, I noticed), approached him, reached up on tiptoe (hand on his shoulder) and kissed him, lightly on the lips. A thousand phrases jammed on my tongue. "I like you, Oleg Davydov," I said inadequately. I stepped away as he reached for me. "Come on, let's go down to that soccer field. The meeting can't start without you." I led the way to the door, quite certain that I didn't want the conversation to continue any longer.

At the doorway he stopped me, and without a word pulled me into his arms, into one of those big Russian bear hugs that let you know that you are not the only consciousness in the world, because of the power and intensity of the flesh. I hugged back, remembering when we were young. Then we pulled our way down the jump tube to the enlarged recreation field. ...And so we parted.

There was a final meeting in the big

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

space they had cleared in the *Lermontov*, a meeting strange and tentative. To each group there, the other was dying. I felt as if miles of plasteel separated me from everyone else. Then they were all milling about, saying goodbye. It all happened very quickly. I felt very tired. Nadezhda and Marie-Anne found me and hugged me. I moved with the others toward the corridor leading to the boat bay, saying "Goodbye ... farewell ... good-bye." Then Eric was standing before me, holding me. Davydov was at his side; they looked at each other. Davydov said, "She's what you leave behind, eh?" Then he took my arm, led me to the corridor. "Good-bye!" Eric called. "Yes," I mumbled. Then we were in the boat bay.

"Good-bye, Emma," Davydov said. "Thank you for your help."

"Don't run into anything,' I said, my voice tight.

He shook his head.

"Good-bye, Oleg Davydov." I could hardly say it.

He turned and walked out of the bay. I got on the boat and we shot out into space, back to *Rust Eagle* where we began. Once there, the new crew members looked looked at each other. Three MSA members who had decided to return, ten or a dozen people bitterly opposed to the starship effort, clustered around Valenski and Duggins, and another dozen people who had not cared, or who had helped the effort. We moved to the bridge by unspoken consent. I went to the window and looked at the starship again. The sun was behind us, and for a second our shadow crossed over the double ship.

I stood just inside the window, watching. I couldn't think; every thought I had short-circuited and died.

The starship moved forward. I moved helplessly along the window with it, watching with the others as it receded, angling away: first a bright belt, then a necklace; a bracelet, a ring, a silver jewel, that diminished and diminished and disappeared.

All that was left was to go home, home to the red planet. At the thought, over everything else, I felt immense relief.

Since then we have all taken on the various tasks we are capable of. And I, in the privacy of my empty room, have written this record; an attempt to save, for the Emma of the following centuries, some account of these months.

Without a doubt this is the strangest crew *Rust Eagle* has ever carried. Ethel Jurgenson, Yuri Kopanev and I have taken over the work on the bridge, which is mostly monitoring at this point. Valenski in turn monitors us, walking about the bridge like a teacher during a test. Ginger Sims and Nikos Micoro, one of the MSA people who decided to return (very quiet he is), are taking care of the farm, with the help of three or four others, including Al Nordhoff. They report to me,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but Valenski insists on being present all the time we are working.

Despite this suspicious atmosphere, relations between the various factions aboard are better than they were at first. About four days into our return Yuri and Duggins started a fight in the dining commons; they had to be pulled apart by Sandra and several others. The two principals were pretty well bruised, Duggins from flying backwards over a table, a wonderful sight to my eyes. For a couple of days we were like two armed camps. Eventually I went to Valenski's room to talk. "You mind your own business and we'll mind ours. Everybody just do their job. When we get back to Mars, they'll take the ship into custody and we can all say what we like."

"Fine with me," he said. "It's you who'll be in trouble then, not me."

True enough, perhaps. But since then things have been relatively calm. In our private meetings Yuri has suggested taking over the ship and going to Earth, but the idea was rejected; first of all, no one wanted to risk a violent confrontation with the loyalists. But more importantly, I think, no one was willing to face the idea of going to Earth. With its wars, its hungry billions, its gravity — we all instinctively felt that nothing on Mars could be as bad. Besides, as Sandra pointed out, Earth is no more than the home of the Committee's bosses, and so it is not much of an asylum.

So we coast toward Mars and wait. I have spent these days like a somnambulist, my mind existing in past months as I wrote this record, or wandering toward Saturn with the starship and its crew. At first I was helpless to control this behavior, and I walked through *Rust Eagle* without responding to my mates; later I cultivated it as a sort of act, as I noticed that it tended to subdue everyone else aboard.

We have no transmitter, and so we have listened mutely to what we can hear on the receiver. There isn't much. Clearly the trouble has continued on Mars, and that makes it hard — not knowing what we are returning to.

But it won't be much longer until we know. I have filled up the weeks with this record, inadequate though it certainly is, for who can translate the amazing bombardment of experience into words? Yet it has passed the time. Deceleration starts today, bringing the blessed attraction to the floor. And soon we will be in Mars space. If I can I will continue this record, to give it a sort of ending. But I fear they will throw us all in jail.

It was the rebels who met us.

I'll never forget the look on Andrew Duggin's face. Reality had betrayed him; the brave were springing up everywhere, even on his home ground, and he couldn't escape them.

And yet I am sure that several of us collaborators were not much less dismayed to be received by anti-Committee forces.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Well, this is how it happened. They met us just outside the orbit of Amor, in one of those little police craft that are used to patrol the space around Phobos and Deimos, and to take prisoners up to Amor. As I stared out the bridge window at the red crescent, wondering if I would set foot on it again, they hurried out of the jump tube — about ten tense-looking men and women, dressed in working one-pieces. They pointed long-nose weapons at us, hot-light guns, and for a long, adrenalin-filled moment, I thought they were removing all the witnesses to the mutiny....

"Is this *Rust Eagle?*" asked a blond-haired man, for we had been unable to respond to their angry questions by radio.

"Yes," two or three of us replied.

The man nodded. "We are the Texan cell of the Washington-Lenin Alliance. You have been liberated—" he smiled, at our expressions I suppose— "and we are taking you as quickly as we can to New Houston, a free city."

That was when Duggins looked as if the world had turned upside-down. Ethel and I looked at each other open-mouthed — Yuri held us both in a hug, moving slowly in front of the guns. It was he who began to explain to the blond man, but he hadn't gone on for long before we were ushered down to the boat bay, to transfer to the police craft. There we were separated into smaller groups and interviewed by a pair of the rebels. Soon I was led to a room containing the blond man and a woman about my age.

"You're Emma Weil?"

I told them I was. They asked me some questions about the MSA and their adventures, and I confirmed the story that Yuri and the others had told.

"So there has been a revolution?" I said. "And the Committee overthrown?"

They were both shaking their heads. "The battle is still on," said the woman, whose name was Susan Jones.

The blond man was her brother. "Actually," he said, "we aren't doing so well." He stood up. "At first the uprising was planet-wide, but now — we still hold Texas—"

"Of course," I said, and they grinned.

"And the Soviet sector. There's still fighting in Mobil and the Atlantic, and in the tunnels on Phobos. But everywhere else, The Committee troops have regained control."

"Royal Dutch?" I asked, my windpipe suddenly constricted.

They shook their heads. "Committee."

"Has it been very violent?"

Susan Jones said firmly, "A lot of people have been killed."

Her brother said, "They broke the dome over Burroughs. Killed a lot of people inside."

"They couldn't have!" I cried. Burroughs....

"They did. They don't care how many people they kill. There's always

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more on Earth to take their place."

"They're being careful of property, though," Susan said bitterly. "That's to our advantage. Otherwise I have no doubt they would have destroyed New Houston outright by now."

"It sounds like you're losing," I said.

They didn't contradict me.

Suddenly the gravity shifted up, and we became heavier. Heavier still.

"But I'm with you," I said, without planning to. "I'm with you if you'll have me."

They both nodded. "We'll have you," Andrew Jones said. "We're going to need life-support people."

The gee diminished to the familiar pressure of Mars. A minute later there was a gentle bump-and-rock. I was home again.

So I joined the revolution.

When we had been settled in the apartment the revolutionaries were using for their command post — it's in the Dallas district, the industrial section of town near the air and water facilities, and the rim of New Houston's perimeter crater — I asked Susan Jones what they were doing with Duggins, Valenski, and their group.

She smiled. "We explained the situaton to them and gave them their choice; join us, or be detained. We told them the truth about the Committee, explained Amor to them. We told them that if any of them joined us and then did anything antirevolutionary, we'd kill them?"

"And?"

"Not one of them have decided yet. Most who have decided have chosen to be detained."

"That Al Nordhoff is a good man—"

"He chose detention."

Of course. And all of us who helped build the starship have chosen to join the revolution. No surprise, although I still have the feeling some of us might have preferred to be met by the Committee. (Am I one of those?)

We were taken to a short meeting with the revolutionary command here — a different sort of committee, a smelly and disheveled group of about twenty-five. They looked like my farm crew used to look after a hard day's work. Or worse. Susan Jones told them what she knew of our adventures, and the story of our rescue. We answered some questions. they looked pleased to see us; here was an anti-Committee project that had succeeded. I became very tired. It had been a long time since I had last slept. Finally they led us back to our rooms, and I fell asleep the moment I hit the bed.

Today they just wanted us to rest. Andrew Jones says some of them want to talk to us again. I've taken the opportunity to get down the story of our arrival. Now again, I'm going to sleep. The Martian gravity I love feels pretty heavy these days.

***

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I talked to Andrew Jones this afternoon. He told me that the revolution began all at once, in every major city on the planet. The entire Soviet space fleet rebelled and pearl-harbored the rest of the Committee's spaceships, with devastating success. "That's why we were able go up and intercept you; we still have partial control of the atmosphere." The railroad tracks connecting the cities were sabotaged, especially at bridges and other problem points. Air and water buildings in every city were stormed, as were some of the police barracks. These last attacks had uneven success. There were as many police as rebels, and so it had been a pitched battle from the start. Fighting in the streets, in every city....

"The U.S and U.S.S.R. have sent reinforcements to the Committee," Andrew finished. "They just arrived. A few big spaceships, really long-distance killers, and some advanced weapons. Personnel killers."

"They must not be too worried about you," I said, "if they're trying to save the buildings and facilities."

"I know," Andrew said, discouraged and bitter. "They think they can just kill us and walk back into their property."

"And you've lost contact with a lot of rebel-held cities?"

"You bet." He became grimly cheerful. "They've retaken most of the sectors, like I told you. They drop in on the air and water buildings and blast there — if there's still resistance in the city, they take away the air. A lot of buildings are self-contained, but that's just mopping up. Some of the rebel cells have set up retreats in the mountains that are hidden — hopefully, they'll have made it out to them."

"What about the general population?"

"Most of them fought for us. At first. That's why we did so well."

"A lot of people must be dead."

"Yes."

A lot of people are dead, killed. People who would have lived a thousand years. My father — jail may have protected him, but on the other hand, he may be dead. And my turn may be coming.

They asked me to make a small speech for the rebels in New Houston, which they would then transmit to the other rebel outposts. "A few of us knew about the MSA," Susan Jones told me. "And once the revolt began, the MSA members still here joined the fight, and they told everyone about the starship effort. It's been a big story, people are very interested and excited to hear about it. To hear you announce that the starship has taken off would be good for morale."

They're in bad shape, I thought to myself. But I got the dozen of us who had helped Davydov's people to sit with me at another meeting in the lounge of the command building. The same group, slightly larger and slightly more exhausted, gathered there. A

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

couple of video cameras were trained on us, and I was given a mike. I said,

"The Mars Starship Association was part of the revolution. They worked isolated from the main effort and have existed for the last seventy-five years." I told them what I knew of the Association's history, aware as I spoke of the strangeness of the fact that I, indeed, was the one speaking. I described the starship and its capabilities; events from the past two months flashed in my mind, disturbing my concentration. "When I left on *Rust Eagle*, I didn't know there was an MSA. I didn't know there was an underground movement dedicated to the overthrow of the Committee. I did know that — I did know..." (suddenly it was hard to talk) "that I hated the Committee and its control over our lives. When I found out about the MSA, sort of by accident out there—" a sympathetic laugh— "I helped it. So did my friends sitting up here with me. Now that we're here, we want to help you, too. I'm glad — I'm glad that the Mars Corporations Committee wasn't here to greet us." I paused to catch my breath properly. "I hope they never rule Mars again."

And at that they stood and cheered. Clapped and cheered. But I hadn't finished! I had wanted to say: Listen, there is a starship leaving the solar system! I wanted to say that out of all our petty and stupid and destructive squabbles on this planet, a pure, feeble effort had struggled away — that the revolution had been responsible for it, partially. And that it was a historical event to stun the imagination....

But I never got to say any of that. My friends from *Rust Eagle* crowded around me, familiar faces all, filled with affection, and my speech was over. We looked at each other with a new tenderness; now, and perhaps from now on, we were each others' family: Noah's cousins.

Not much time left. The city has been broached by police troops, and we'll be evacuating soon.

I was up on the crater's rim with Andrew Jones when the missiles started falling on the spaceport just east of the city crater. The explosions were bright enough to leave blue afterimages in our eyes, and they lofted tall, lazy clouds of rusty dust above the larger chunks of spaceport.

Inside our hoursuits the attack had been soundless, though I felt the thumps of the explosions. "Our turn," Andrew said without emotion. "We'd better get back down."

We descended the crater wall and were just outside the command post buildings when the dome fell. I guess they weren't worrying about property anymore; perhaps New Houston is the last rebel city left. We saw the starring appear around the perimeter, saw the huge sections of thin plasteel crack and tilt as they slowly dropped toward us. Then we were under the eaves of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

building and in the protection of the door lock.

The plasteel rained down for a long time. The police troops followed immediately, coming down on individual rocket-backpacks. Figures in suits began pouring into our lock from indoors, not worrying about loss of air pressure inside. Andrew and I were handed two of the long-nosed light-rifles, and we slung the straps over our shoulders and stepped from the lock....

There were a lot of them falling, in pale red suits. But it was a vunerable way to come down. Beams of light laced the dark-pink sky; the police troops shot back as they descended. But they had to control their rocket-packs, and they were falling. Their aim was bad. We shot them out of the sky. I pushed the trigger button on my gun and watched the beam intersect with a human form that was falling and shooting in my direction. Suddenly he tilted over, and his rockets powered him down into buildings a few blocks away. I sat down, feeling sick and cursing the Committee for attacking in such a stupid and wasteful fashion, cursing and cursing. The common band roared with voices. A beam hissed near me and I scrambled for cover under a building's eave, thinking, not rain drops but death beams, these eaves are for ... stupid stuff like that. I looked up again. If a beam hit the rocket-packs for more than an instant, they exploded. Little pops like obscene firecrackers burst everywhere above me. I cursed and sobbed, hit the wall of the building with my gun, pointed it at the sky and shot again.

Over on the other side of the city the defense wasn't doing so well. Hundreds of police descended in the residential district across the crater from us. Then they stopped falling.

A voice on the radio said, "Enemy is contained in the residential quarter. Return to headquarters or outposts five, six, seven or nine." This was the first sentence in a half-hour that I had understood. I found Andrew and followed him to the command building. It was just three hours after dawn, when we had ascended the crater wall.

In the command apartment everyone took off the headpieces. Others were helping a man who was shaking uncontrollably.

After a half-hour to clear our senses, there was a meeting in the central lounge. Susan Jones, still in her silver suit, sat down beside me. "We're going to evacuate the city."

"And go where?"

"We have a contingency plan for this situation."

"Good." Ethel and Sandra and Yuri joined us, and Susan raised her voice to include them.

"There always was the chance this would happen, of course. We just had to risk it...." Her mouth pursed. "Anyway, we've got some retreats out in the mountains south of here. Hidden colonies, underground or in caves. They're all small and well-separated.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Since we took over the cities, we've been stocking them and supplying them with the equipment to become self-contained units."

"They'll spot us from satellite photos," I said.

She shook her head. "There's more land surface on Mars than on Earth. And geographic features so impenetrable as to defy belief. Even if they photograph it all, they won't have the time or the people to examine all the photos."

"Computer scan—"

"Can only catch regular shapes. Ours are disguised and hidden. They'd have to check all the photos by eye — an impossible task. Mars is too big. So. We have retreats, and they're ready.

"The other choice," she continued, looking at our faces, "is to fade away in the city and pretend you were neutral and hiding the whole time. Could be tough. But we've programmed a lot of imaginary people into the city register, and you could become one of those."

Then the meeting was called to order by a tall thin man, and Susan joined him. "The police are contained for now," he said. "But our situation in Houston is untenable, as you know. As soon as it's dark, we're going to disperse, and either evacuate or infiltrate the city. Field boats hidden in the Spear Canyon will take off for the mountains. There we'll start the revolution over again." The man looked tired, disappointed. "You all knew this was a possibility. That the best we could do this time would be to establish the hidden outposts. Well, that's how it has turned out. I'm afraid we've lost space control. And that we're one of the last cities left holding out." He consulted with Susan. "Those of you who want to continue on in this city, we've got a list of apartments near here that still have air. And we've got the fake identities ready for your pictures and fingerprints and all."

He whispered with the people around him some more. Ginger Sims joined us. Conversations began among the forty or fifty people in the room. "Okay. Get some rest before sunset. That's all for now."

So there it is. Ethel and Yuri are in the next room, arguing about what to do; but I never even thought about it. I'm going into the mountains. In a curious way it is as though I had decided to go with the starship after all.... Enclosed in a little underground colony, where we will have to work hard to establish a life-support system, I have no doubt. And yet we are still on Mars — and still opposing the Committee — so I have what I want. I'm satisfied.

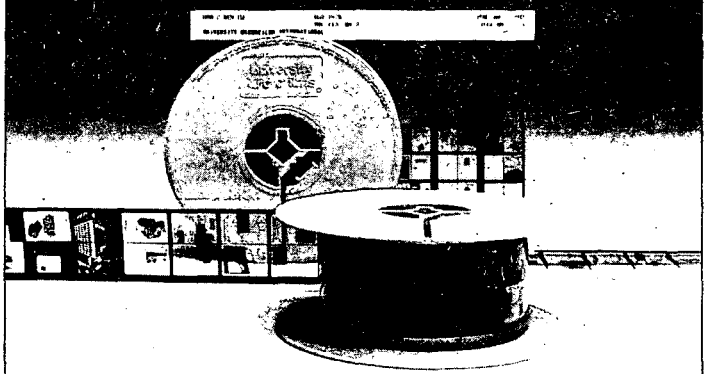
There is little time left. I am too nervous to rest, I have been writing for an hour. We will leave soon. All of my friends from *Rust Eagle* are coming along. I think of the starship, flying away from all this ... of my father. My thoughts are dense and confused; it's hard to write one thing at a time.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The police will follow us into the mountains. The Committee will want to wipe out every vestige of resistance. But this desire is just part of what insures that we will succeed. We didn't come to this red planet to repeat all the miserable mistakes of history, we didn't. Even if it looks like it so far. Martians want to be free, truly free.

I'm going to go in the boat with Andrew, so he tells me. His sister and my companions will be along. That will be the most dangerous part, the escape tonight. It looks as though it will all happen as I dreamed it out there in the asteroid belt. I will run over the surface of red Mars forever and ever, for the rest of my life. I just didn't know I was going to be chased.

This publication is available in microform.



University Microfilms International

Please send additional information
Name _____
Institution _____
Street _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____

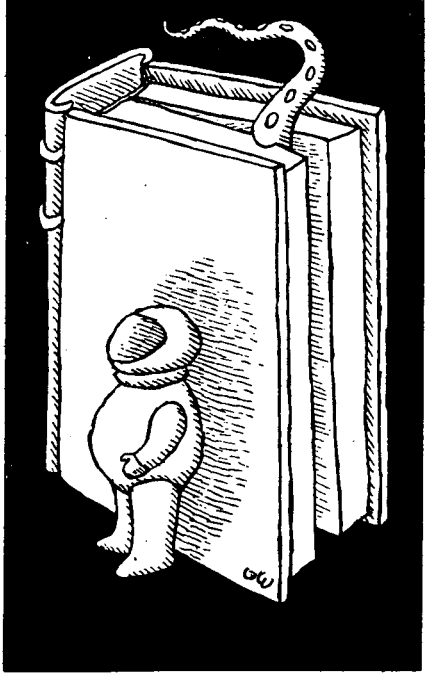
300 North Zeeb Road
Dept. P.R.
Ann Arbor, Mi. 48106
U.S.A.

30-32 Mortimer Street
Dept. P.R.
London W1N 7RA
England

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

ALGIS BUDRYS



Drawing by Gahan Wilson

Friday, Robert A. Heinlein, Holt, Rinehart, Winston, $14.95.

Starburst, Frederik Pohl, Del Rey, $12.50

The Eureka Years, Annette McComas, ed., Bantam, $3.50

In the F&SF Competition for archetypal lines by famous authors, my entry for Robert A. Heinlein is: "'How *bright* we are!' I cried in unison." But there's less of that in *Friday* than in any recent Heinlein novel. There's still plenty of it, particularly for those sensitized to it by the recent series of overblown confections from its author. Nevertheless, *Friday* is Heinlein's first novel in years. And a tricky one it is, too; good and tricky, tricky and good.

It comes in layers, as all Heinlein novels do. There is the surface story, and there is the subliminal structure. The difference between a good Heinlein novel and a bad Heinlein quarter-million-word note to himself is the difference between the qualities of those underlying theses. In the good novels — *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* was the last previous one — the message has meaning for others besides the author, it works whether you know it's there or not, and it makes irrelevant such chronic flaws as Heinlein's having all his heroes speak in the same voice from the same glossary.

The surface story is a sequel to "Gulf"; the mysterious figure who sends "combat courier" Friday Jones on her various *realpolitikal* errands turns out to be Kettle Belly Baldwin,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and a high proportion of Friday's genetic material comes from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Green. The social milieu — always Heinlein's strong suit — is a world where fortified houses and strong-arm politics are fully justified by the fact that the world has Balkanized following World War III, a disaster sufficiently limited so that technological progress — under glitzy social guidance whose floss and plasticizers disguise the fact that everything trembled on the brink of slipping back into Medievalism — resumed without much of a hitch.

There is a heavy dependence on horsedrawn vehicles and there is control of fuel-expenditure, but on the other hand there are starships, true portable power, and antigravity. Acapulco gets taken out by a nuclear device flung at it as a business measure by a "multinational." Those are corporate states without geographic boundaries, as distinguished from the "territorials," of which North America has about six, two Canadian and three at least in the former U.S.A.

It's not possible or necessary to pin that down exactly. It's not necessary because you soon get the idea, and it's not possible because Heinlein's characters don't go around recapping their political history. Like real people, they don't bother telling each other what everyone knows, so we eavesdroppers have to put it together from allusions, and from noticing that several major 20th-century population centers are never mentioned, the capital of California is San Jose, and some parts of the North American surface are never entered. I don't recall a single reference to Russians or anything in the present-day Soviet Union. I don't recall a single reference to "World War III," either. Heinlein has sufficiently regained his ability to create details by omission.

Major technological quantum-jumps are starships, the "Shipstone" power packs that drive them (and your wristwatch too), and the vacuum tunnels that lace the continent with their ultrafast interurban trains. The rest — antipodal rocket flights, houses protected by elaborate deathtrap systems, Yahooism as the Opium of the People and a tough, self-interested upper middle class that thinks it's an aristocracy and is psychically dissociated from the mass — you will recognize.

The problem is that the world may yet slip back into the milieu of barons and earls. (For some reason, this bother Heinlein even while his heroes all aspire to baronial lives.) Kettel Belly, ostensibly just a freelance purveyor of clandestine services to the highest bidder, displays a devious, elaborated social conscience and an unabashed willingness to take action on its behalf.

That's the background. Against it, Friday Jones tells her first-person story. Working for a boss she knows as Doctor Baldwin, a crippled and deteriorating old man, Friday's occupational specialty is getting messages delivered no matter what. And in the first chap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ter, as she comes down from a Clarke/Sheffield orbital station and immediately plunges into violent cloak-and-dagger action, we get to see that in harrowing detail. Committing reflex murder, being tortured and subjected to multiple deviant rape, and all those other trimmings, however, leave her with cheerfully unimpaired morale. What really bothers her is the fact that she's an AP — an artificial person. Baldwin has bought her out of servitude, erased her ID marks, and supplied her with impeccable credentials as a human being, but she continues to be obsessed with the fact that she's a neo-Nigger attempting to pass for a full member of a society which has declared APs have no souls.

This obsession forms a constant background murmur to whatever else she does. (What else she does is essentially a catalog of travel scenes, a sampling of the social contacts possible in this culture, and periodic jolts of peril in situations she could have avoided if Kettle Belly had ever given her any of the mysteriously withheld information that was well within her need to know.) Finally she winds up living happily ever after as a housewife.

Seen as a hugger-mugger story, then, it's weak, erratically paced, and full of anticlimaxes. Seen as the standard SF android story, it has its underpinnings taken out when, late in the book, Kettle Belly points out that she's not artificial; none of the APs are. She's the victim of a social confusion that hangs this label on perfectly human products of genetic engineering and then segregates them socially.

Not only is it unlikely that Baldwin could possibly be the first person to utter this observation in her presence, it's impossible in terms of her own character and intelligence that she could have bought this scam for any length of time and spent her life despising herself instead of militating against the social injustice. Although Heinlein tries, apparently hard, to draw the parallel between APs and blacks, its success as a sophism depends on a set containing all Uncle Toms and no Huey Newtons or Muhammad Alis. It's also interesting that he had to play Henry Ward Beecher; although depicted as positively bristling with extraordinary physical and mental powers, Friday still has to have Massa clarify for her the central fact of her existence. So that part of the story is also full of holes, if you take it seriously.*

Perhaps you should. But you may be off the point. What this really is, apparently, is the examination of seventeenth-century European society through the device of having Robinson Crusoe bring his native companion back to it, and showing it through Friday's eyes. If so, this is our first sub-

**I will also bet some reasonable sum that, despite a death in circumstances remarkably parallel to those attendant on the perceived destruction of the computer in* Harsh Mistress, *we haven't seen the last of Kettle Belly.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stantial clue to where the Future History comes from, or at least the first clue I've noticed in thirty-five years of looking. The primary parallel seems unmistakable — for one thing, the herky-jerky nature of the ostensible story suddenly makes much better sense, as does Friday Jones' naivete. It's possible to find plenty of internal evidence for the more general proposition that Heinlein thinks, and possibly has thought all along, that there are important parallels between Reformation Europe and the American Colonies, and the U.S.A. and the stars under an Age of Reason respectively, with the Age of Reason apparently to be as short-lived as America's was, and, even so, still well in the future beyond Friday's lifetime.

You want to remember, in reading any Heinlein novel, that it was written by one of the sharpest political scientists of our time. In fact, I know of none who can match Heinlein's claim to having in the 1930s predicted Jerry Falwell as a phenomenon of society, alongside urban decay, blurring of sexual distinctions, the forting-up of the middle class, and all those other accurately forecast aspects of the time around the Crazy Years.

This book will probably have aroused two kinds of reaction by the time you read this review. It will be adulated by some, and it will pop the corks of a score of sorts of doctrinaire.

I have a doctrine too. It's my doctrine that no book ought to be published unless it in some way represents an effort to make things clearer and better to some extent. That's not asking much. It does exclude a lot of books, in and out of the SF field. This one is a keeper.

Hardly a month is going by, it seems, without something from Frederik Pohl. Up to now in 1982, these have been story collections or novel reissues. What we have this time is a little different. Still not a new story, but at least a new novel: *Starburst*, made from his most famous novella, "The Gold at the Starbow's End."

"Gold" was not only a superior piece of work, and Pohl's first appearance ever in *Astounding/Analog*, but eminently suitable for a longer format. A stranger coming upon *Starburst* would never think it could be told in fewer words. One would be likelier to feel it's a little short. But then, Fred almost always rushes his endings. It's not crucial this time.

The prime mover of the story is dirty Doctor Dieter von Knefhausen, a cross between Edward Teller and what's-his-name the new Metternich ... worked for Nixon as a shuttle diplomat ... oh, well, anyway, a cross between those two people. As science advisor to a U.S. president around the coming turn of the century, Knefhausen sends a carefully picked crew aboard the first starship to Alpha-Aleph, the planet of Alpha Centauri he pretends to believe actually exists. He presents this piece

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of ostensible exploration to the president as a potitical move to bolster U.S. prestige, in an increasingly restless world beset by the developed versions of the desuetude you can see accumulating outside your window.

What it actually is, is the working model of Knefhausen's theory that if you put the right people into a bottle, give them the right kinds of intellectual toys to play with, and subject them to increasing pressure, they will invent all sorts of marvelous things. This works. Knefhausen's only miscalculation is his expectation that, after they have turned themselves into supermen on the van Vogt model, his "children" will have any interest in radioing back any information Earth can use to better its own condition and Knefhausen/Kissinger can use to get his arse out of the crack as the world and the president gradually realize he's hoaxed them.

Pohl has always been a leading exponent of the "science-fictiony" touch; the intriguing fact of contemporary science and the likeable obscure theory which, put together, can be extrapolated into a situation with jaw-dropping effect. That aspect of his story just booms along, piling one plausible wonder atop another in a spray of large and small verisimilitudes. Finally, of course, having found no planet to land on and resupply from, his parahuman ship's company just goes ahead and builds one, having meanwhile sent back to Earth a pulse of causal something or other that permanently cancels all nuclear power.

That's one expression of their feelings. Another, eventually, is to send an expedition back to Earth to see what's going on, and possibly even hand out some well-intentioned charity. Among the expedition members are Eve Barstow, the moron among the original crew, and Uncle Will, who died enroute to Centaurus but wasn't otherwise seriously discommoded. The rest of the expeditionary crew are children, and they're the ones qualified to be in charge. Which means that in many ways, none of the envoys of the super race are qualified to deal with Earthpeople gone back to barbarism.

The problem here — if there is one — is that the second story is qualitatively different from the first. It's not about what you can do with science, or about how awe-inspiring the products of rationality can be. It's not about politics, and it's no longer about Tellinger, who, having somehow survived all sorts of vicissitudes, finally dies as an effective actor at about the time the starfarers come back. It's a sociological story from that point on, and even though Uncle Will, playing a part something like analogous parts in the work of Thorne Smith, keeps Kissinhausen around as a species of buffoon, what we have now is a far different stripe of social satire.

It's not a bad stripe. But it's broad comedy on the one hand and very pedestrian sociology on the other, in the sense that there's hardly a character in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this section whom Poul Anderson hasn't had firmly in his repertory company for over thirty years. This was telling stuff a generation ago; now it's the tale our fathers told us. And it's in sharp contrast to the razor-edged, informative, witty and crisp situation of the first three-quarters of the text.

I don't know. Even just putting one little world after the other, four pages a day come rain or mud, Frederik Pohl can do SF with a practiced dexterity few can match. There's a whole bunch of people like him; writers who have forgotten more about this field and about commercial writing than most people will ever learn. Writers who deliver a dependable byline at regular intervals, earn their money, and are constantly being solicited for more material by every publisher in the field.

I don't suppose there's any way at all to put pressure on them to push beyond that, is there?

All anyone needs to expect of newsstand SF, of course, is that it furnish sufficient entertainment to be a better buy than some other form of entertainment. And there was a time when all that was expected of an SF magazine was that it bring in one dollar a month more than an air war, jungle story or western pulp magazine produced in the identical format for the identical cost. That's it, folks — those were, and to an overwhelming extent still are, the only requirements.

If that shocks you, that's good; that means you're behind any effort at doing better, an effort in which the majority of writers have always been engaged and the majority of editors and publishers have often done their best to encourage. If you feel, as you're entitled to, that SF has attained to a point where its average level of quality is higher than any analogous level in the whole history of any kind of mass literature, you can thank the people who managed and contributed to the commercial newsstand SF media throughout the history of the field since *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories* were founded in the 1920s. The very few noncommercial or semipro media we have seen along the way all foundered because their promulgators were too idealistic or too inept to do the bottom-line things: to get the stories to where the readers could find them, and to reward the writers for their contributions. Commercial publishing can display a gallery of ripoff artists as an adjunct to the larger quarters housing the people who over the years just did an honest day's business for an honest day's dollar. But it can show no villainies comparable to the highway robbery and pocket-picking committed on the writers and readers by bright-eyed patrons of literature with their unsullied standards. That ain't no way to encourage the troops. The starved and stifled writer rarely creates functional improvements in his metier, and if he does they never get out of the closet.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Still, there is this persistent duality of feeling; the idea that in addition to wanting to do better at the way it's done, there are worse and better ways of doing it at all. Ways that are not so much operationally better, but better in terms of some esthetic standard.

I'm a pretty persistent offender when it comes to badgering people to go beyond the minimum. Sometimes I even do it by appeal to some abstract set of eternal verities that may have no objective existence as truths and may fall far short of eternity. I just feel things in my bones and then make up reasons, as I suspect we all do. The one thing I can be pretty sure *is* universal and thus eternal is the feeling that there must be something better even if I don't know what it is or why it's better. And even though I suspect sometimes that what put it in my bones is my learned feeling that I ought to put something in my bones. Nor do I think for a minute that you are any different, or that people like Tony Boucher or Mick McComas were any different. They knew there had to be something better, and they thought they could sometimes tell what it was. And so they started a magazine — this one — and for whatever reason we can now say with assurance that they made something different that now and again does something better.

The founding editors of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* also had one special quality that isn't universal: having gotten the idea that they knew what a better magazine ought to contain, they went through all the interminabilities and duck-nibbles that have to be gone through in order to make something like that actually happen. When *The Magazine of Fantasy* first appeared, possibly as a one-shot, certainly very much on trial as a viable medium, they had already spent *four years* getting it to that point.

All that and more is detailed in *The Eureka Years*, a Bantam original edited by Annette McComas, widow of J. Francis McComas. It's marketed more or less as an anthology of top fiction from F&SF's early years — 1949-1954 — and it does contain a high number of absolutely first-rate fiction pieces, many of which have become legends. There's Matheson's "Dress of White Silk," which some call as good as his debut, "Born of Man and Woman"; Knight's "Not With a Bang," Sturgeon's "The Hurkle is a Happy Beast," "Come on, Wagon!" Zenna Henderson's first story — there are a lot of first or near-first stories by people who have since become giants; Phil Dick for one, Gordon R. Dickson as a short-story writer for another. It's purely amazing how quickly Boucher and McComas were able to attract excellent people who had never published before, or had never published anything like what they did for F&SF; there's Manly Wade Wellmen's first Silver John story, there's perhaps the best story Evelyn E. Smith ever wrote, there's the poignant example of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mildred Clingerman's first story, which ought to have been the first of hundreds.

But this volume is really an account of how this magazine began and how Mick and Tony kept it running; there are copies of correspondence with authors, with Lawrence Spivak and with Joe Ferman when Spivak was the founding publisher and Ed Ferman's father was the business manager ... there are even copies of interoffice memoes and of rejection letters to would-be contributors. The stories thus serve not only on their merits but as documentation for a fascinating history that sparkles with the verve and the sometimes idiosyncratic energy of all those concerned with giving this new thing a secure foothold. I wish I had been there; Lord knows, I tried, and I don't know how I feel about the world's having been saved the sight of some of the rejection letters F&SF sent me.

I have my quarrels with Tony, whom I eventually got to know to some small extent. Some of them are abstract — Science fiction is *not* a branch of fantasy, damn it! — and some are emotional. I have none with Mick, perhaps because the one time I met him I decided he was the kind of person whose natural attitude toward the world is one of such intense camaraderie that all lesser matters are revealed as trivial. Obviously, the world would be richer if we still had them with us. *The Eureka Years* conveys, among other things, a very immediate feeling for that; not only will it tell you a lot, it will make you feel good. Mrs. McComas has done an excellent, loving and yet meticulous book. I found one, count it, one place where the error may be hers. Boucher's reference to "Augie and Wandreth" is clearly more than a reference to just Donald Wandrei, and may be a phrase packed with just about a much sharp allusion as any one offhand phrase you're likely to come across.

But Bantam! Holy cats, Bantam! They have done about as much as typographical error and mistakes in layout can do to destroy this book, which butts-up material against unrelated material, scrambles spellings, omits section headings, and has no page numbers on its Table of Contents. Other than that, it's as fine a piece of publisher's follow-through matching his initial impulse as I've seen since the Four Flying Goodman Brothers were publishing *Marvel Science Fiction* contemporaneously with the early issues of F&SF and, no doubt about it, doing it worse.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From the late James Blish, an unpublished piece, admittedly minor but still great fun. God bless you, Jim.

The Art of the Sneeze

BY
JAMES BLISH

I have often been asked to reveal some of the secrets of successful sneezing, especially in the spring; and now that my farewell concert is behind me, I feel it only fair to offer a few suggestions for the guidance of aspirants to this high art.

The novice almost invariably feels that — given a good instrument — his range can be almost limitless, since he has all of the world's languages to choose from. But this notion contradicts one of the first principles of sneezing: *The sneeze-word should never get in the way of the sneeze.* This rules out a great deal of German almost at once. In German nouns in particular, there is often so much sheer pronunciation going on as to quite overwhelm the vehicle — a phenomenon often noted by lovers of the art-song. However, quite tasteful effects can be achieved with some of the softer German infinitives, such as "umfassen."

On the other hand, most French and Portuguese words tend in themselves to suggest that the speaker has a slight head-cold. Hence they require great mastery in their use, if the audience is not to be left in doubt that anything was said at all. Needless to say, the true artist can take advantage of this apparent drawback to produce experiences of high subtlety, but in general the beginner is well advised to *avoid onomatopoeia.*

This leads naturally to the third basic rule, which is that *the sneeze should never physically affect the audience.* Only the crudest performer resorts to such assaults as "Bang, splat!" There is of course a grey or border area here, exemplified by such words as "Petrouchka," but the inexperienced had best reserve even these for *al fresco* performances.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The strictures above may lead the reader to suppose that I am counselling the avoidance of explosive consonants, but this is far from the case. Spelling is not nearly as important as where the accent falls in the word. The difficulty with "bishopric," for example, is not the initial "B" (though it does present its own problems) but the fact that the stress falls at the beginning, the rest being pure anticlimax. Russian words with delayed stresses, no matter how consonant-sprinkled, can be overwhelming; I have seen "snegourotchka" leave an entire auditorium quite dazed.

Some virtuosi are famous for the ability to sneeze entire sentences, but I have always felt that this is misapplied mastery and had best be left for sideshows. One performer, whom I shall not name, used as an encore a sentence borrowed from a Lovecraftian short story by Charles R. Tanner, which went " 'Ng topuothikl Shelomoh, m'kthoqui hnirl." Since Mr. Tanner just made this sentence up out of his head — except for "Shelomoh," which he got off the top of a bottle — the stress may be placed anywhere, and the performer in question of course delayed it to the very last word. While this sort of thing can dazzle an unsophisticated audience, it will soon be seen through for what it is — the sacrifice of content to technique.

The student had far better model himself on those masters who devote themselves to the *emotional* burden of the sneeze, which can often be conveyed through apparently simple means. No one is ever likely to improve upon the magnificent Lester del Rey, who has moved millions of radio listeners to tears with an unassuming but profound "Ah-choo, Goddamit!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bill Pronzini and Barry Malzberg have collaborated on several stories for F&SF, and here is one of their best, a mordant vision of Shakespeare in the 20th century.

Shakespeare MCMLXXXV

BY
BILL PRONZINI and BARRY N. MALZBERG

Act I

Shattered by rejections of the off-off-Broadway circuit and the regional theaters, the cold incestuousness of the university circuit, Shakespeare turns his back on the theater. Perhaps he will do better in the prose arena. *Timon of Athens?* Perhaps he can novelize *Timon of Athens.*

He takes out that weary, overplotted morality drama, considers it. Water shrieks in the pipes of the two-room apartment on East 3rd Street near Avenue B where he is living under an assumed name; roaches and rats chase each other inside the walls. *Timon of Athens.* The raving monologues, the soliliquies of hatred roaring through the final acts, make him wince. Damme. How could he have taken all of this stuff seriously in his youth? Nonetheless, there might be something he could do with it. He could drag in Ophelia from that other dog, *Hamlet,* maybe sex it up a bit, open the thing after Timon loses his purse. Update it. Well, he will give it a try.

Shakespeare sighs heavily, coughs, puts some paper into his typewriter. Dogs snarl in the corridors; down the street he hears the sound of an automobile collision. This is no life, he thinks. It is absolutely no life for a man of his sensitivity.

He wishes he could lay hands on whoever brought him here three years ago. Disorientation, culture shock, loneliness ... it had almost driven him mad at first. But he is nothing if not adaptable; he has managed to learn the current ways, the current speech patterns, and how to keep his mouth shut

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about who he really is (he had almost been put away in an asylum twice in the first month). He has managed to survive.

The fact is, however, he does not have a clue to who brought him to this miserable century. He does not even know how he was snatched away in his forty-third year and plunked down in the middle of New York City, 1982. Time warp? Time machine? Alien intervention? The hand of God? It is another of life's great mysteries, life's great tragedies. He understands tragedy, after all, if he understands little else.

Still. Still. This damme century is carving his guts out.

Act II

Shakespeare picks up a woman at a Performance Garage *Oedipus Rex* and brings her back to his apartment. She is querulous at first but a little persuasion — persuasive rhetoric has always been his long suit — gets her there. Her name is Gloria and she is an assistant buyer for Bloomingdale's; ladies' lingerie, mostly.

"How come you're in a dump like this?" she says, looking out his window at the street where several adolescents are beating one another with tops of garbage cans. "Is this any way to live?"

Shakespeare shrugs. No, it is no way to live. *Timon the Great* (his new title for the novelized version) has been rejected in portion-and-outline by Unicorn Books after a four-month hold; an assistant editor finds some of the writing of mild interest but says a novel of this type has no place in their current publication program. The manuscript and letter lie atop his bed; he tries to find some way to discreetly hide them, but Gloria takes notice before he can do anything. She gives the letter a quick scan.

"Is this some kind of Gothic?" she asks knowledgeably. "Or a romantic historical?"

"Neither," Shakespeare says. A firecracker explodes in the distance, or maybe it is a gunshot. He hears brakes scream like a dying cat. "It's more of a mainstream novel."

"Well, you shouldn't try paperback original," Gloria says. "You can't sell out of catagory to a paperback house, you know, unless you're Rosemary Rogers or somebody." She sits on the bed, bounces. "You got any uppers?" she says.

Shakespeare says, "I'm sorry—"

"Oh, don't *explain*," Gloria says. She lights a Virginia Slim. "If there's one thing I'm not into, it's explanations. The only handle on experience is the other end." She takes a puff, exhales smoke, looks at Shakespeare, shrugs, puts the cigarette on the floor and grinds it out, and takes off her sweater. "So do you make moves or don't you?" she says. "Just let me know your position."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Act III

Shakespeare, seeking advice in this difficult age, tries to obtain a literary agent. Most of them have full client lists, however, and are unable to take on anyone new at the present time, cannot read unsolicited material and so on; but a large agency in midtown is willing to read and criticize his work for a fee. After which, if it is salable, they will take it out to market. Although his funds are running out — he supports himself by taking odd jobs, dishwasher, leaflet distributor, and the like; he has yet to make a dime from his writing — Shakespeare mails in the portion-and-outline of *Timon the Great* with his last $100 to cover the reading fee. Then, heeding the advice given in the agent's promotional material, he puts Timon out of his mind and decides he will try a short story called "Goneril," which he might possibly sell to one of the men's magazines. The story is not easy to do. He finds himself blushing at the sex parts.

He receives a notice from his landlord that the building is being converted to a condominium tenancy. He will have to vacate premises within ninety days unless he is willing to invest several thousand dollars to make this his permanent property.

Gloria is promoted in the Bloomingdale's heirarchy and is never at her phone; she will not return his calls.

The literary agency returns *Timon the Great*, along with a letter pointing out that despite certain clear distinctions of style and tone, it possesses severe plotting defects, anachronisms of background, speech, and motivation ("no one would go into a forest if all his money were stolen"), and is not saleable in the current marketplace. The letter-writer thinks Shakespeare has potential, however. Further submissions are invited.

Shakespeare submits "Goneril" to *Bottoms Up*, which, his current edition of *Writer's Market* tells him, is interested in lively, upbeat stories with an erotic theme. "Goneril" is not *too* upbeat, but then the graphic sex parts ought to count for something.

He enters into a desultory affair with a student at the Mannes College of Music who moves in across the hall from him. Her scholarship funds have run out and she has been reduced to these circumstances until she can get some solo bookings. Helping her carry her harp to a local coffeehouse for a one-night engagement almost kills him. He is not the man he was.

Act IV

Shakespeare is forced to vacate his apartment and, with the harpist, moves to even grimmer quarters near the river on Houston Street — a studio walkup. The harpist has lost all faith in her career and wants to return to New London, Connecticut, but Shakespeare

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prevails upon her to stay with the situation for only a few more months. He has convinced himself that he is in love with her, although this is not really so and the harpist knows it.

Bottoms Up apparently loses "Goneril;" his phone queries after a three-month hold are ignored.

He prepares a 36-page revised and updated synopsis of *Hamlet* and takes the manuscript to a new paperback house, Scepter Books, where he insists on seeing the editor. Finally he gets past the receptionist and is given an audience with a twenty-three year old Swarthmore graduate, who promises to give the proposal a fast reading and response.

He calls Gloria again, on a whim. Somebody at Bloomingdale's tell him she has gotten married and moved to Cincinatti.

"Goneril" (retyped) is rejected by *Leather Stockings* and *Black Garter*; neither magazine finds it erotic enough. The editor at *Bottoms Up* hangs up when he hears Shakespeare's voice on the phone.

Scepter Books rejects *Hamlet* with a printed form stating that it is not suitable for their current list.

Shakespeare goes out for a long walk by the river, where he is almost mugged by a passing jogger. When he returns the harpist is gone. A smudged note on the table indicated that she has come to her senses. She has left her harp, likewise most of her possessions; Shakespeare plucks at the strings of the unwieldy instrument which has taken up almost all of their living space. Plainsong and ode. A dull and pervasive sense of failure gnaws at him.

The telephone rings. It is the editor at *Bottoms Up*, who tells him that the manuscript of "Goneril" has been found and summarily rejected. "If you'd been a little more patient," the editor says in a nasty voice, "and a little more polite, we might have taken it. As it is, the hell with you."

Shakespeare sits down and stares at the 36-page revised and updated synopsis of *Hamlet*. But he can make no sense of it; the letters, the typing, just make no sense.

"Kill," he says. "Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill."

Then he sighs wearily and goes once more to his typewriter.

Act V

Nothing sells. Not a novel, not a short story, not a poem nor sonnet, not even a 60-page script with some boffo laughs slanted for one of the half-hour TV sitcoms.

Desperate, Shakespeare answers a *Times* ad for an assistant advertising copywriter. Using his actor's training, he talks his way into the job. The agency, Flippen and Royce, is a small one; their largest and most important account is the fast-food chain known as Wonder Waffles. Like everyone else at the agency, Shakespeare is put to work

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on a saturation ad campaign which the head of Wonder Waffles has requested.

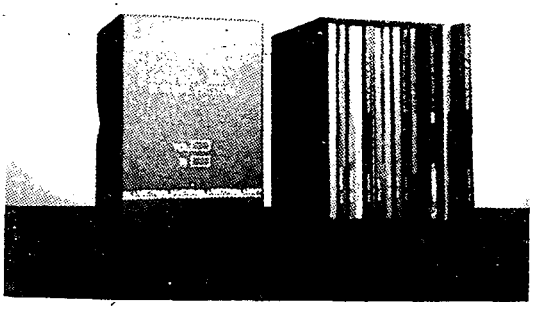
He applies himself to the task and in three days comes up with a 40-page presentation based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The morning after he delivers it, he is called into the office of M.R. Flippen, the agency's patriarch, who tells him the presentation is brilliant. The head of Wonder Waffles thinks so, too. They like it so much, in fact, that Shakespeare is being promoted immediately from assistant copywriter to junior executive, with full expense-account privileges. If he continues to produce in the same vein, Flippen says, he will one day be put in charge of the entire Wonder Waffles account.

At noon Flippen takes him to lunch at the Four Seasons, where Shakespeare discovers a nascent taste for dry vodka martinis. Over their fourth round, Flippen confides that the Wonder Waffles presentation is not only brilliant, the wording of it is the most moving he has read in forty years in the advertising racket.

Damme right, Shakespeare thinks as he gestures to the waiter for a fifth martini.

Aren't I the best there ever was?

CURTAIN



Handsome, Sturdy

VOLUME FILES

for Your Copies of

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Each Volume File will keep 12 copies of FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION clean, orderly, and readily accessible. Sturdily built, the files are covered with a rich black and red washable leatherette, and the lettering is in 16-carat gold leaf.
Reasonably priced at $5.95 each, 3 for $17.00 or 6 for $30.00, they are shipped fully postpaid on a money back basis if not satisfactory. Order direct from:

JESSE JONES BOX CORPORATION
Dept. F&SF P.O. Box 5120 Philadelphia, Pa. 19141

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The two-centimetre-tall demon that figured in "One Night of Song" (April 1982) returns in this impish tale about the law of conservation of merriment. The big news from the Good Doctor is the fall release of his new novel, FOUNDATION'S EDGE.

The Smile That Loses

BY

ISAAC ASIMOV

I said to my friend, George, over a beer recently (*his* beer; I was having a ginger ale), "How's your implet these days?"

George claims he has a two-centimetre-tall demon at his beck and call. I can never get him to admit he's lying. Neither can anyone else.

He glared at me balefully, then said, "Oh, yes, you're the one who knows about it! I hope you haven't told anyone else!"

"Not a word," I said. "It's quite sufficient that I think you're crazy. I don't need anyone thinking the same of me." (Besides, he has told at least half a dozen people about the demon, to my personal knowledge, so there's no necessity of *my* being indiscreet.

George said, "I wouldn't have your unlovely inability to believe anything you don't understand — and you don't understand so much — for the worth of a pound of plutonium. And what would be left of you, if my demon ever found out you called him an implet, wouldn't be worth at atom of plutonium."

"Have you figured out his real name?" I asked, unperturbed by this dire warning.

"Can't! It's unpronounceable by any Earthly pair of lips. The translation is, I am given to understand, something like: 'I am the King of Kings; look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair.' — It's a lie, of course," said George, staring moodily at his beer. "He's small potatoes in his world. That's why he's so cooperative here. In *our* world, with our primitive technology, he can show off."

"Has he shown off lately?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact," said George, heaving an enormous sigh and raising his bleak blue eyes to mine. His

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ragged, white mustache settled down slowly from the typhoon of the forced exhalation of breath.

It started with Rosie O'Donnell [said George], a friend of a niece of mine, and a fetching little thing altogether.

She had blue eyes, almost as brilliant as my own, russet hair, long and lustrous, a delightful little nose, powdered with freckles in the manner approved of by all who write romances, a graceful neck, a slender figure, that wasn't opulent in any disproportionate matter, but was utterly delightful in its promise of ecstasy.

Of course, all of this was of purely intellectual interest to me, since I reached the age of discretion years ago and now engage in the consquences of physical affection only when women insist upon it, which, thank the fates, is not oftener than an occasional weekend or so.

Besides which, Rosie had recently married — and, for some reason, adored in the most aggravating manner — a large Irishman who does not attempt to hide the fact that he is a very muscular, and, possibly, bad-tempered person. While I had no doubt that I would have been able to handle him in my younger days, the sad fact was that I was no longer in my younger days — by a short margin.

It was, therefore, with certain reluctance that I accepted Rosie's tendency to mistake me for some close friend of her own sex and her own time of life, and to make me the object of her girlish confidences.

Not that I blame her, you understand. My natural dignity, and the fact that I inevitably remind people of one or more of the nobler of the Roman Emperors in appearance, automatically attracts beautiful young women to me. Nevertheless, I never allowed it to go too far. I always made sure there was plenty of space between Rosie and myself, for I wanted no fables or distortions to reach the undoubtedly large, and possibly bad-tempered, Kevin O'Donnell.

"Oh, George," said Rosie one day, clapping her little hands with glee, "you have no idea what a *darling* my Kevin is, and how happy he makes me. Do you know what he does?"

"I'm not sure," I began cautiously, naturally expecting indelicate disclosures, "that you ought to—"

She paid no attention. "He has a way of crinkling up his nose and making his eyes twinkle, and smiling brightly, till everything about him looks so happy. It's as though the whole world turns into golden sunshine. Oh, if I only had a photograph of him exactly like that. I've tried to take one, but I never catch him quite right."

I said, "Why not be satisfied with the real thing, my dear?"

"Oh, well!" She hesitated, then said, with the most charming blush, "He's not *always* like that, you know.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He's got a *very* difficult job at the airport and sometimes he comes home just worn out and exhausted, and then he becomes just a little bit touchy, and scowls at me a bit. If I had a photograph of him, as he really is, it would be such a comfort to me. —*Such* a comfort." And her blue eyes misted over with unshed tears.

I must admit that I had the merest trifle of an impulse to tell her of Azazel (that's what I call him, because I'm not going to call him by what he tells me the translation of his real name is) and to explain what he might do for her.

However, I'm unutterably discreet — I haven't the faintest notion how *you* managed to find out about my demon.

Besides, it was easy for me to fight off the impulse, for I am a hard-shelled, realistic human being, not given to silly sentiment. I admit I have a semi-soft spot in my rugged heart for sweet young women of extraordinary beauty — in a dignified and avuncular manner — mostly. And it occurred to me that, after all, I could oblige her without actually telling her about Azazel. Not that she would have disbelieved me, of course, for I am a man whose words carry conviction with all but those who, like you, are psychotic.

I referred the matter to Azazel, who was by no means pleased. He said, "You keep asking for abstractions."

I said, "Not at all. I ask for a simple photograph. All you have to do is materialize it."

"Oh, is that all I have to do? If it's that simple, *you* do it. I trust you understand the nature of mass-energy equivalence."

"Just *one* photograph."

"Yes, and with an expression of something you can't even define or describe."

"I've never seen him look at me the way he would look at his wife, naturally. But I have infinite faith in your ability."

I rather expected that a helping of sickening praise would fetch him round. He said, sulkily, "You'll have to take the photograph."

"I couldn't get the proper—"

"You don't have to. I'll take care of that, but it would be much easier if I had a material object on which to focus the abstraction. A photograph, in other words, of the most inadequate kind, the sort I would expect of you. And only *one* copy, of course. I cannot manage more than that, and I will not sprain my subjunctival muscle for you or for any other pin-headed Being in your world."

Oh, well, he's frequently crotchety. I expect that's simply to establish the importance of his role and impress you with the fact that you must not take him for granted.

I met the O'Donnells the next Sunday, on their way back from mass. (I lay in wait for them actually.) They were willing to let me snap a picture of them in their Sunday finery. She was delighted and he looked a bit grumpy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about it. After that, just as unobtrusively as possible, I took a head-shot of Kevin. There was no way I could get him to smile or dimple or crinkle or whatever it was that Rosie found so attractive, but I didn't feel that mattered. I wasn't even sure that the camera was focussed correctly. After all, I'm not one of your great photographers.

I then visited a friend of mine who was a photography wiz. He developed both snaps and enlarged the head shot to an eight by eleven.

He did it rather grumpily, muttering something about how busy he was, though I paid no attention to that. After all, what possible value can his foolish activities have in comparison to the important matters that occupied me? I'm always surprised at the number of people who don't understand this.

When he completed the enlargement, however, he changed his attitude entirely. He stared at it and said, in what I can only describe as a completely offensive tone, "Don't tell me you managed to take a photo like this."

"Why not?" I said, and held out my hand for it, but he made no move to give it to me.

"You'll want more copies," he said.

"No, I won't," I said, looking over his shoulder. It was a remarkably clear photograph in brilliant color. Kevin O'Donnell was smiling, though I don't remember such a smile at the time I snapped it. He seemed good-looking and cheerful, but I was rather indifferent to that. Perhaps a woman might observe more, or a man like my photographer friend who, as it happened, did not have my firm grasp on masculinity, might do so.

He said, "Just one more — for me."

"No," I said firmly, and took the picture, grasping his wrist to make sure he would not withdraw it. "*And* the negative, please. You can keep the other one — the distance shot."

"I don't want *that*," he said, petulantly, and was looking quite woebegone as I left.

I framed the picture, put it on my mantelpiece, and stepped back to look at it. There was, indeed, a remarkable glow about it. Azazel had done a good job.

What would Rosie's reaction be, I wondered. I phoned her and asked if I could drop by. It turned out that she was going shopping but if I could be there within the hour—

I could, and I was. I had the photo gift-wrapped, and handed it to her without a word.

"My goodness!" she said, even as she cut the string and tore off the wrapping. "What is this? Is there some celebration, or—"

By then she had it out, and her voice died away. Her eyes widened and her breath became shorter and more rapid. Finally, she whispered, "Oh, my!"

She looked up at me. "Did you take

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this photograph last Sunday?"

I nodded.

"But you caught him exactly. He's adorable. That's *just* the look. Oh, may I *please* keep it?"

"I brought it for you," I said, simply.

She threw her arms about me and kissed me hard on the lips. Unpleasant, of course, for a person like myself who detests sentiment, and I had to wipe my mustache afterward, but I could understand her inability to resist the gesture.

I didn't see Rosie for about a week afterward.

Then I met her outside the butcher shop one afternoon, and it would have been impolite not to offer to carry the shopping bag home for her. Naturally, I wondered whether that would mean another kiss, and I decided it would be rude to refuse if the dear little thing insisted. She looked somewhat downcast, however.

"How's the photograph?" I asked, wondering whether, perhaps, it had not worn well.

She cheered up at once. "Perfect! I have it on my record player stand, at an angle such that I can see it when I'm at my chair at the dining-room table. His eyes just look at me a little slantwise, so *roguishly* and his nose has *just* the right crinkle. Honestly, you'd swear he was alive. And some of my friends can't keep their eyes off it. I'm thinking I should hide it when they come, or they'll steal it."

"They might steal *him*," I said, jokingly.

The glumness returned. She shook her head and said. "I don't think so."

I tried another tack. "What does Kevin think of the photo?"

"He hasn't said a word. Not a word. He's not a visual person, you know. I wonder if he sees it at all."

"Why don't you point it out and ask him what he thinks?"

She was silent while I trudged along beside her for half a block, carrying that heavy shopping bag and wondering if she'd expect a kiss in addition.

"Actually," she said, suddenly, "he's having a lot of tension at work so it wouldn't be a good time to ask him. He gets home late and hardly talks to me. Well, you know how men are." She tried to put a tinkle in her laughter, but failed.

We had reached her apartment house, and I turned the bag over to her. She said, wistfully, "But thank you once again, and over and over, for the photograph."

Off she went. She didn't ask for a kiss, and I was so lost in thought that I didn't notice that fact till I was halfway home and it seemed silly to return merely to keep her from being disappointed.

About ten more days passed, and then she called me one morning. Could I drop in and have lunch with her? I held back and pointed out that it would be indiscreet. What would the neighbors think?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, that's silly," she said. "You're so incredibly old — I mean, you're such an incredibly old friend, that they couldn't possibly — Besides, I want your advice." It seemed to me she was suppressing a sob as she said that.

Well, one must be a gentleman, so I was in her sunny little apartment at lunch time. She had prepared ham-and-cheese sandwiches and slivers of apple pie, and there was the photograph on the record player as she had said.

She shook hands with me and made no attempt to kiss me, which would have relieved me were it not for the fact that I was too disturbed at her appearance to feel any relief. She looked absolutely haggard. I ate half a sandwich waiting for her to speak and when she didn't, I was forced to ask outright for the reason there was such a heavy atmosphere of gloom about her.

I said, "Is it Kevin?" I was sure it was.

She nodded and burst into tears. I patted her hand and wondered if that were enough. I stroked her shoulder abstractedly and she finally said, "I'm afraid he's going to lose his job."

"Surely not. Why?"

"Well, he's so *savage*, even at work, apparently. He hasn't smiled for ages. He hasn't kissed me, or said a kind word, since I don't remember when. He quarrels with *everyone*, and *all* the time. He won't tell me what's wrong, and he gets furious if I ask. A friend of ours, who works at the airport with Kevin, called up yesterday. He says that Kevin is acting so sullen and unhappy at the job that the higher-ups are noticing. I'm *sure* he'll lose his job, but what can I *do*?"

I had been expecting something like this ever since our last meeting, actually, and I knew I would simply have to tell her the truth — damn that Azazel. I cleared my throat. "Rosie — the photograph—"

"Yes, I know," she said, snatching it up and hugging it to her breasts. "Its what keeps me going. This is the *real* Kevin, and I'll always have him, *always*, no matter what happens." She began to sob.

I found it very hard to say what had to be said, but there was no way out. I said, "You don't understand, Rosie. It's the photograph that's the problem. I'm sure of it. All the charm and cheerfulness in the photograph had to come from somewhere. It had to be scraped off Kevin himself. Don't you understand?"

Rosie stopped sobbing. "What are you *talking* about? A photograph is just the light being focussed, and film, and things like that."

"Ordinarily, yes, but *this* photograph—" I gave up. I knew Azazel's shortcomings. He couldn't create the magic of the photograph out of nothing, but I wasn't sure I could explain the science of it, the law of conservation of merriment, to Rosie.

"Let me put it this way," I said. "As

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

long as that photograph sits there, Kevin will be unhappy, angry and bad-tempered."

"But it certainly *will* sit there," said Rosie, putting it firmly back in its place, "and I can't see why you're saying such crazy things about the one wonderful object — Here, I'll make some coffee." She flounced off into the kitchen and I could see she was in a most offended state of mind.

I did the only thing I could possibly do. After all, I had been the one who had snapped the photograph. I was responsible — through Azazel — for its arcane properties. I snatched up the frame quickly, carefully removed the backing, then the photo itself. I tore up the photograph quickly across into two pieces — four — eight — sixteen, and placed the final scraps of paper in my pocket.

The telephone rang just as I finished, and Rosie bustled into the living room to answer. I restored the backing and set the frame back in place. It sat there, blankly empty.

I heard Rosie's voice squealing with excitement and happiness. "Oh, Kevin," I heard her say, "how wonderful! Oh, I'm so glad! But why didn't you tell me? Don't you *ever* do that again!"

She came back, pretty face glowing. "Do you know what that terrible Kevin did? He's had a kidney stone for nearly three weeks now — seeing a doctor and all — and in terrible, nagging pain, and facing possible surgery — and he wouldn't tell me for fear it would cause me worry. The idiot! No wonder he was so miserable, and it never once occurred to him that his misery made me far more unhappy than knowing about it would have. Honestly! A man shouldn't be allowed out without a keeper."

"But why are you so happy now?"

"Because he passed the stone. He just passed it a little while ago and the first thing he did was to call me, which was very thoughtful of him — and about time. He sounded *so* happy and cheerful. It was just as though my old Kevin had come back to me. It was as though he had become exactly like the photograph that—"

Then, in half a shriek, *"Where's the photograph,"*

I was on my feet, preparing to leave. I was walking rather briskly toward the door, saying, "I destroyed it. That's why he passed the stone. Otherwise—"

"You *destroyed* it? You—"

I was outside the door. I didn't expect gratitude, of course, but what I wasn't expecting was murder. I didn't wait for the elevator but hastened down the stairs as quickly as I reasonably could, the sound of her long wail penetrating the door and reaching my ears for a full two flights.

I burned the scraps of the photograph when I got home.

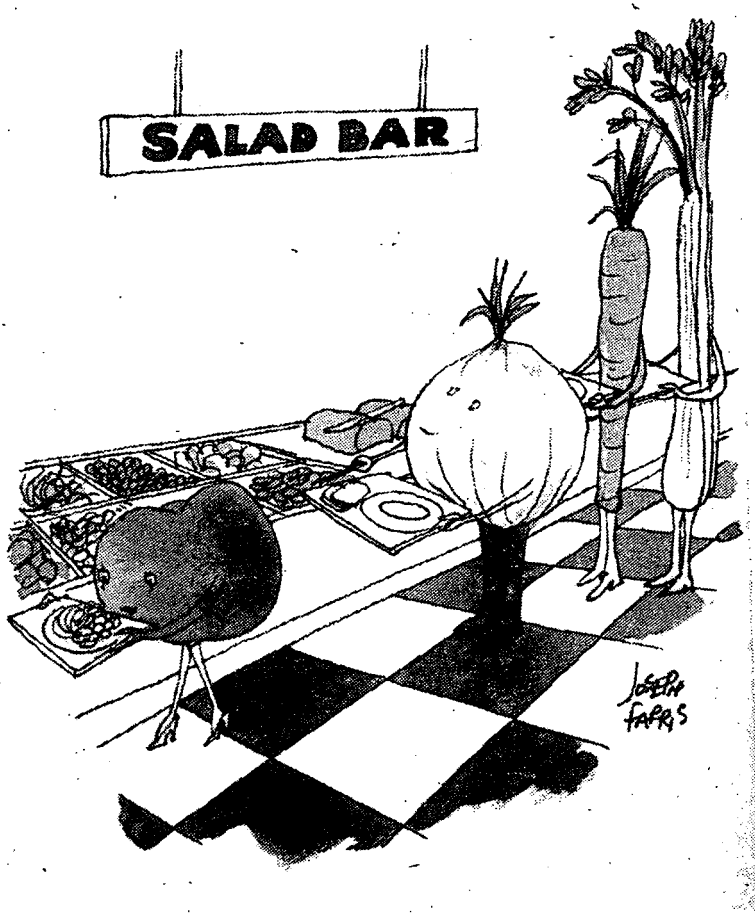
I have never seen her since. From what I have been told, Kevin has been a delightful and loving husband and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they are most happy together, but the one letter I received from her — seven pages of small writing, and nearly incoherent — made it plain that she was of the opinion that the kidney stone was the full explanation of Kevin's ill-humor, and that its arrival and departure in exact synchronization with the photograph was sheer coincidence.

She made some rather injudicious threats against my life and, quite anticlimactically, against certain portions of my body, making use of words and phrases I would have sworn she had never heard, much less employed.

Again I suppose she will never kiss me again, something I find, for some odd reason, disappointing.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A first-rate fantasy about Ireland by Cooper McLaughlin, who writes: "Unlike most writers I have not held a wide variety of jobs. I joined the Army at sixteen and served five years as an Airborne Infantryman. For the past several years I have been a Professor of Psychology in the California State University system."

The Shannon Merrow

BY
COOPER MCLAUGHLIN

It was three years since I'd been in Youghal. Even if you've never been to Ireland, you've probably seen the region. The film *Moby Dick* was shot there, and the locals still laugh about the day the great rubber whale blew out to sea.

From the cottage which is mine since my mother's death you can look over the reaches of the Blackwater River. Opposite are the green rolling hills where *Barry Lyndon* was filmed. Down to the right you can see the decaying gray stones of an abandoned abbey, and beyond that the fire-blackened facade of a country house, once owned by the Anglo-Irish ascendancy.

I stood in the doorway of the cottage. The sun was bright but a cold March wind blew up the valley. At the mouth of the river two open fishing boats pulled a string of orange floats.

I felt depressed. It was here that I'd done my first crude sketches. Later when I'd learned to paint, I rode Uncle Frank's ancient Norton motorcycle over the country roads. With a box of watercolors and a cool bottle of stout, I was free.

From the time I was nine until I went into the army, each summer I'd fly from San Francisco to Shannon to meet my Uncle Frank. Sometimes my mother would come with me but usually she was too busy making a living for the two of us.

I looked at my watch. Ten-fifteen. I had an appointment with Uncle Frank at eleven to sign the documents transferring the title of the cottage to me. I pulled the suede jacket over my nearly useless right arm. Two AK-47 rounds had shattered my shoulder and upper arm. The bones had healed but the nerves were dead — the end of my career as a painter.

Copyright © 1982, Cooper McLaughlin.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I got into the rented blue Ford Escort. It's no trouble for me to drive in Ireland. My right arm is good enough to steer and I can work the left-hand shift easily. I drove down the short rutted path and through the gate. I got out and swung it shut on the rusty hinges. I looked back at the house with its shaggy rush roof, the whitewashed walls stark against the sea of green grass. "The grass of half a cow is what you have," Uncle Frank said, "half a cow at the most." True, it was not a large place, but it was filled with the fragile ghosts of happier times.

There was a warped wooden sign bolted to the gate. Uncle Frank, who, before he'd gone into law had studied archaeology, gave me the old name of the place. CNOC GRIANAN ... The Hill of the Place of the King. My shoulder began to ache and there was a lead ball weighting my stomach. No point in trying to hang on to the past. Perhaps I should sell the place after all. I got in the car and drove down the hill. At the bottom I stopped and pulled a bottle of Paddy from the glove box. I took a long hit, letting the smooth gold whiskey run down my throat.

Youghal is not a large town, but it is old. People talk of Cromwell's troopers as if they'd been there yesterday. I turned from the High Street and up an alley to Nalley's bar. Nalley's is for serious drinkers. No bearded young men in imitation Aran sweaters blowing tin whistles and bagpipes, no jukebox blaring Chieftains' records. Just a long dim room, the bar lined with cloth-capped men, drinking black Guinness. At the far end were three rickety beer-soaked tables. Against the smoke I caught sight of Uncle Frank at one of them, sitting under the black draped portraits of Jack and Robert Kennedy which were lit by a pair of red votive candles.

He saw me and smiled, raising two fingers. I edged my way to the bar and got the curate's attention. With one hand I carefully carried the thick glasses, each with a good fistfull of whiskey, over the layer of cigarette butts which carpeted the floor.

Uncle Frank is not really my uncle. Like my mother he is a MacNeil, and in the convolutions of Gaelic lineage, counted as her cousin. After my father's death he acted as a surrogate parent. He taught me to fish and shoot and sail a boat, and to drink with dignity.

Frank was a tall man, gray-haired, with the flattened nose of a former county hurling star. He dressed like the prosperous Dublin lawyer he was. Hanging from his gold watch chain was an ancient Roman coin. "The mark of MacNeil's folly," he called it. A souvenir of his brief career as an archaeologist. "We've enough of burrowing through the old raths like rats in a cellar." He had told my mother, "The country needs developing, not digging up." So he had abandoned the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

life of the scholar and read the law.

"Ah ... the O'Reilly himself." Frank smiled. "Michael, you're a saint. Another minute and I'd have perished from the thirst."

I glanced at the empty glass at his elbow. "You don't look perishing to me ..."

"Well, now. The first one's for the mouth. This one's for the soul." He held up the glass. I knew there was no rushing the process. One more round, talking of sports, politics, the weather. Then business.

I leaned back in the rickety chair and lit a cigarette. "Grand day today, isn't it?" I began the ritual.

Two drinks later we were finished. Frank tucked the signed documents into his briefcase and snapped it shut.

"What will you do, now the place is yours?"

I could feel the whiskey popping sweat beads on my forehead. "I don't know ... sell it maybe ..."

"Sell it! Its been in the family for a hundred years! You'll not be a favorite around here if you peddle it to a German or an Arab ..."

"Frank, I don't know. It gets me just to see the place."

He fingered his glass, "Is it money you need then?"

"No." I thumped the dead right arm on the table. "I've a government-guaranteed lifetime income right here. Not a high return on the initial investment ... but I don't need much."

"What are you doing with yourself now?"

"This and that."

"What's 'this and that'? I mean *work* for God's sake."

"Nothing much. Bumming around ..."

Frank touched my arm. "You've got to do something with your life, boy. You can't go on moping about."

"I thought about writing. But I don't know if I have anything to say."

"God save us! Writing!" He slammed the glass on the table. "Just what the world needs ... another scribbler. It's not the drink that's the curse of the Irish ... it's literacy." He jerked his head toward the bar where a young man in steel-rimmed glasses was pulling stout. "Ten pounds to a pence he's got an unfinished novel under the pumps ... or chisels Gaelic verse in the Ogham ..."

"Frank, if I wanted a sermon, I'd ask Father Fitz."

He drained his Paddy. "Ah, well, boy, I know. I get carried away." He fingered the worn coin on his vest. "We need men of business. Men who can make things go, not superstitious dreamers or mystical poets."

He shoved his glass toward me. "One more then." His voice was tired.

I couldn't handle any more whiskey. So I sat there playing with a half-pint of stout. Frank's face was flushed.

"Now I've an idea. There's an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American firm I'm representing. They need a bright young man like you. You're American and you'll know their ways. You could live here and keep *Cnoc Grianan*. And you've the right contacts."

"Meaning you."

"Meaning me." He smiled.

"And what does this famous company do?"

"Computer softwares."

I had a sudden vision of giant disposable diapers filled with electronic turds. The room was hot. I knew Frank meant well, and I didn't want to hurt his feelings, but I needed to get out of there.

"Frank, I don't know ... I can't think anymore ... for the last few years my head has been totally fucked ..."

He flinched at the crudity and glanced quickly over his shoulder to be sure Sister Mary Monica wasn't standing there, ruler at the ready.

"Michael, I'm not pressing. It's only that I want to see you make something of your life."

"I was making something of my life. Now I don't know ... maybe I don't really care." The stout tasted like a wet ashtray.

"When must you go back to the States?"

"Tomorrow. Next week. Doesn't make a helluva lot of difference."

Frank took out a black leather appointment book. He studied it for a moment.

"Michael. I'll ask a favor. I've got a new Seamaster up at Carrick. I need it run down to Athlone. There's no hurry. You could be a week about it. Rest yourself. Do a bit of coarse fishing. Think about your life." He hesitated, looking at my right arm, "Could you ..."

"Could I single-hand it, you mean?" I laughed. "How big is it?"

"I wouldn't be having the *Queen Mary*, would I? It's a thirty-footer. Center cockpit."

"No problem."

"You'll do it then?" He finished his drink. "That's a great favor. I've not the time these days to bring it down myself."

"Why is it up there?"

"Getting a new top and windscreen. I lent it to a client. One of the Germans. The great clod took it under the Rooskey bridge with the top up. The boat went through, but a great part of it stayed behind."

"Did he pay for it?"

"Pay for it? Three hundred pounds' damage, and I got a bloody *verziehung* from him. So I put an extra five hundred on his bill for 'services rendered'". He winked, "Fortunate it was that my insurance made up the deficit." We both laughed.

"Okay, why not." I stood up, "I'll get my gear together and you can pick me up in the morning."

"That's grand. I'll drive you to Carrick and then I'm back to Dublin. Call me from Athlone and I'll pick you up there."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

***

I found the boat at the fuel dock. *Manannan McLir — Athlone* in gold Gaelic script on the transom. Jimmy Dwyer, an ancient red-haired leprechaun was pumping diesel into her. He turned as I came up the dock and waved his pipe in salute. A billow of smoke issued from his mouth as a quart of fuel sloshed over his shoes.

"Michael, man, good to see you again." He looked up at the black thunderheads coming in from the north. The cold March wind raised chop on the river. "Soft day isn't it now?"

It was a new, well-fitted boat. I ducked into the forward cabin. Frank had called ahead, and the food locker and calor refrigerator were stocked. On the galley table were a case of Guinness, a bottle of Paddy, and two fresh loaves of soda bread.

I went on deck. Jimmy handed up my gear and I stowed it in the aft cabin. I checked the engine, a specially fitted 72-hp Perkins. Jimmy tucked the fuel nozzle under his arm and scratched a match across the scarred NO SMOKING sign. "There's no telling where that U-boat commander took the top off, is there?"

"Not a bit, Jimmy. You did a good job."

"Will you be off now?"

"That I will. I'm only down to Carnardoe today, but I want to get there before the weather breaks."

"I'll be casting you off then. Watch out for periscopes."

I laughed. It is heartening to know that Americans are no longer number one on the Ugly Tourist short list.

It was only an hour run to Lake Carnardoe. I knew where I wanted to go. An old stone jetty hidden in the reed beds that surround the lake. As a boy I'd spent a lot of happy solitary time there.

Now the Shannon is one of the world's most beautiful rivers. It's an easy river, but you have to be careful. Navigational aids are minimal, and there are shifting shoals and reed beds to trap a boat. In the summer you can see the tourist rent-a-boats stranded up and down the river, waiting to be pulled off. I threaded my way through the nearly hidden channel. The rain broke, a solid sheet, bending the reeds. I kept just enough speed to make way. Then I saw it, glistening gray-black stone, a rusty iron bollard at each end. The wind was hard. I shut down and jumped to the jetty, getting a line out before the boat could blow away.

Later, I sat naked in the warm aft cabin, sipping Paddy. In the west the sky turned red. For the first time in years I felt at peace. I rolled some whiskey down my throat and listened to the rain.

It was late afternoon of the third day when I found myself below Cloondara. Thunderheads were building up in the west. I decided to make the short run to Lanesboro.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was cruising at quarter speed when the boat began to shudder. I put it in reverse and jockeyed the throttle. There was a noise aft that sounded like the stuffing box coming through the deck. The propeller was fouled. I shut down the engine.

The river was deserted. The boat was drifting toward the reed banks. In a few minutes I'd be stuck, at least for the night, maybe longer. I went forward and let loose the anchor. Taking a boathook I tried to free the screw, but whatever was fouling it wouldn't come loose. I sat in the cockpit and smoked a cigarette. There was one solution. I could go over the side with a line and try to cut it free. I looked at the cold gray water. The prospect was not appealing, but then neither was the idea of being stranded.

"Shit." I flipped the cigarette over the side and got the snorkel gear out of the locker.

The water was freezing. The nylon line cut into my chest. Through my face mask I could see the problem. A red rag was twisted around the prop.

I came up gasping. My skin was purple and showed goosebumps like grapes. I threw the offending rag into the cockpit. Catching the gunwale, I levered one leg over and collapsed shivering on the deck. I'd had the presence of mind to hang a towel on the wheel. I rubbed myself until the purple turned red. As I turned to go below, I heard a cry. If there is a *banshee*, it was her voice. The cry echoed its agony across the water.

I dropped the towel and stared at the reed bed. The reeds swayed. I caught a glimpse of white and gold rising from the water. The scream of a mortally wounded animal struck me. I grabbed the binoculars. My hand was shaking so badly, it was hard to focus. I held the glasses tight against the neck strap, thumb pressed against my temple.

It was a woman. No hallucination. A real woman. Long blonde hair hanging wet over her back. She turned and I could see the water running down her breasts as she struggled through the reeds. Then she was gone.

"Hello! ... Hey! You need help?" I shouted. To my left I saw movement. I brought the glasses up. A slim naked body scrambled up the bank and into the trees. I let the glasses drop against my chest. *No one* swims naked in Ireland. There are men here, fathers of eight children, who've never seen a woman's skin between neck and knee.

"Hey there ... hey!" The boat pitched. The anchor wasn't holding. If I didn't get moving I'd be grounded for sure. I started the engine. Something cold and wet brushed against my foot. I looked down. It was the red rag.

It was nearly dark when I sighted the Lanesboro bridge. On the right, just across from the peat-fired power plant, is a narrow stone-walled channel. I pulled in. There is just enough room for two or three thirty-footers to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moor. Quiet, deserted, and protected from the winds blowing off Lough Ree.

I poured myself the last half-inch of Paddy while I changed into warm clothes. What I really needed was a tightly rolled joint and a loose woman, but these are as likely to be found in Ireland as a bushel of snakes. I was ready to settle for fresh salmon and a jar or two at the Bridge Hotel.

On deck I noticed the red rag lying near the wheel. I picked it up. I felt a jolt as if from a static charge. Looking closely, I saw it was not just a piece of cloth, but something like a watch cap. There was a metallic feel to it, yet it had the give of some synthetic fabric. Amazingly there were no rips from the propeller. It was small, but it stretched easily to fit my head.

I looked around. Frank was right. A few days on the river was what I needed. The colors were bright. The cracked gray stones of the jetty showed patterns I'd never noticed before. The aching inner canker of depression was gone. From across the river came the clear sweet sound of a tin whistle playing "Julia Delaney." With the taste of good salmon already on my tongue, I made for the bridge.

When I left the hotel, my stomach was well anchored by a large salmon steak, good Irish potatoes steeped in thick cream and butter, and half a loaf of soda bread fresh from the oven. I pushed the red watch cap back on my head and headed for Devlin's Pub.

Ed Devlin is a retired New York City detective. Like many retired Irish-Americans he finds the Old Country not only congenial, but far from the prying eyes of the IRS and the Social Security Administration. He also makes the best Irish coffee in the world — an ancient Gaelic tipple invented a few years ago by Stanton Delaplane of the San Francisco *Chronicle*.

There were a dozen or so men at the bar downing pints, and one young couple at a table. I was on my second coffee when the door to my left opened. There was a sudden silence. An old woman stood in the entrance. She was dressed in a shapeless black coat. A skirt came to the tops of her high-laced boots. On her head she wore an odd black hat of Queen Mary vintage, fastened by a steel pin. She leaned on a heavy cane and surveyed the room. The silence was broken by a flurry of Gaelic greetings and much tipping of caps.

Swinging her cane, she walked the length of the bar. As she passed me she paused. I was half-turned on my stool and gave her a smile. Her blue eyes were as cold as ice. I turned back to my drink as she clumped away into the gloom at the rear.

The noise resumed. Ed began to draw a pint.

"What was that apparition?"

Ed lowered his voice. "You've not seen her before? That, my boy, is beán

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

O'Meara: Not 'missus,' mind you, but 'bean.' She's been around since Saint Brendan set sail." He topped off the pint and carried it to the rear.

When he returned he poured us both a shot. "She must have an eye for you. She asked me who you were."

"That's a great compliment."

"Believe it, man. Even the bishop tips the biretta to that one." He began to polish a glass, "True, she's a bit strange. Lives in a cottage up by the old rath. Tutors the young ones in Irish for the Civil Service. Like an up-to-date hedge school."

I pulled the shot glass toward me, "She looks like a witch."

Ed smiled and picked up another glass to polish, "A witch, is it? No ... she's a good old soul. Every day to Mass, and thick with the priests. There are some who say she's of the *sidhe*." He looked at me thoughtfully, "But we're modern men and don't believe in fairies and such, now do we?"

"Only the ones I've seen back home on Castro Street."

"None of them in this country." He jerked his head toward the back, "But her now, she's a National Treasure ... knows all the old stories. Always some professor coming up from Dublin with the boot full of tape machines. 'Folklorists,' they call themselves."

Ed moved down the bar to take orders from two hard-looking types in leather-patched jackets. I lit a cigarette and thought about tomorrow. I wanted to make the run across Lough Ree, at least as far as Glassan. It's not a long trip, but there are large warning signs above the bridge discouraging private boats from going alone. The weather is unpredictable and at times the lake gets dangerously rough.

On my way in, I'd seen two boats tied up at the quay. I finished my drink. In the morning I'd see if their skippers were interested in making the run. I pulled the watch cap over my ears and moved to the door.

There was a tap on my shoulder. I turned. "Herself requests your presence." Ed gestured toward the back.

"Me? What for?"

"I wouldn't know. Maybe she fancies your curly hair. Just be civil. She's got a tongue that'll take tar off the road. Go on with you ..." He gave me a gentle shove.

She sat like a dowager queen, black-gloved hands folded on the top of her cane. In the smoky light her wrinkled face stood out with startling luminosity.

"Sit down, boy."

I sat, feeling like a grammar school boy accused of some heinous crime by the Mother Superior.

"Have you the Irish?"

"My grandparents were from ..."

She cut me off. "I don't mean the blood. I can see that. You've a face like Paddy's pig. I mean the language."

"A word or two, that's all."

"That's all any of them have these

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

days. Even the politicians ..." She lifted the pint and took a sip. "You've been badly hurt, haven't you?"

I felt my face flush. "I got hit. In Vietnam."

She moved her gloved hand to touch my right arm. I pulled back.

"I don't mean that. I mean the inside hurting."

I wanted to tell the nosy old bitch to mind her own business. I shoved back my chair. "I've got to take care of my boat. You'll excuse me ..."

"Sit! You'll go when I give you leave." The force of her voice pushed me back in the chair.

She paused, then gave me a smile. "That's better. Now, suppose you tell me how you got that red hat you're wearing."

"I found it."

Her eyes were on my face. "You found it in the water, did you?"

"How did you know?"

She ignored the question. "And did you see or hear anything strange when you got it?"

I told her what happened. I didn't mention that the woman I saw had been naked.

"Give me the cap." She took it gently, held it to her breast, eyes closed. "It is. It is indeed the *cohuleen driuth*." She opened her eyes. "The cap of the merrow ... you call them mermaids." Her voice was soft.

I repressed a sigh. I don't know what I expected, but I wasn't in the mood for some old-woman-blather about mermaids or fairy folk.

She leaned forward. "Now you listen to me, boy. You've a good heart but you're green as a cabbage. What you believe doesn't change what is. This cap is from the Tir-Faoi-Thonn ... the Country Under The Waves."

She placed the cap on the table, keeping her hand on it. "When a child is conceived in that country, the mother weaves such a cap for it. When it is born, it is placed on the child's head. That is what allows the merrow to live under the water. It is made for that one person alone, and no other. If it is lost or stolen, the merrow must leave Tir-Faoi-Thonn forever ... or die."

"Are you suggesting that the cap belongs to the woman I saw, that she's a mermaid ... a merrow?" I tried to keep the scepticism from my voice.

"I'm not suggesting, boy ... I'm telling you now."

"Look. That was an ordinary woman I saw. No tail, no scales. I saw her walk."

She sighed and leaned back. "You're like the rest, you are. You don't believe the *sidhe* exist. Still, you think leprechauns sit on toadstools, cobbling boots, and mermaids have tails like fish. They don't. They are folk like you ... and me."

I thought if I humored her I could cut this short. "Oh. I believe you. What's this got to do with me?"

"You've the cap, haven't you? Give

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it back." I felt her touch again on my arm. "Think of that poor girl — condemned to walk in the world like us — never to see home or family again. Think of her loss ..."

"What do you want me to do? Throw it back in the river?"

"That you musn't. It might be lost forever. Take it back where you got it. Wait ... just wait. The girl won't have gone far. Without the *cohuleen driuth* her life will be a hell. She'll come for it, I know."

The moon was up and the west wind blew fresh off the lake, bringing with it a drift of turf smoke from some distant cottage. I sat in a deck chair, watching the hypnotic shimmer of silver light on the water. I touched the red cap which I'd folded in my windbreaker pocket. It felt warm.

Even by Irish standards the O'Meara woman was an eccentric. Still, her intensity got to me. Suppose it were true and the girl was condemned to a life of misery because of me?

"Oh, bullshit!" I muttered. I went below and climbed into my bunk.

That night I dreamed I was making a night jump at Fort Bragg. I stood alone in the door and then I was out. Below I could see the markers of the drop zone. I counted for the opening shock but it didn't come. In panic I looked up to see the tightly rolled canopy streaming behind me. I had no reserve 'chute.

The black ground rushed up. I closed my eyes. Then I was in water, plunging down through a warm opalescent sea, the shroud lines wrapped tightly around my legs. There was a burst of yellow light. A woman came swimming toward me, her body gold-white in the light. A cloud of platinum hair framed her face. The red mouth opened and a soundless scream filled the sea.

I woke late, with a mouth like Cromwell's boot. When I checked the quay, the other boats were gone. I debated about making the run by myself but decided against it. I had lunch at the hotel, then stopped off at Devlin's for a resupply of the booze locker.

It was midafternoon when I got back to the boat. I lay in my bunk trying to read, but I was too restless. I pulled on my jacket and went on deck. The wind was rising but the sky was clear. I stuck my hand in the pocket of my windbreaker and felt the warm cloth of the cap.

"Cohuleen driuth" ... Nonsense. But the Irish are susceptible to nonsense, and none are more Irish than Irish-Americans. I pulled the cap from my pocket. Beán O'Meara ... a superstitious old witch, whatever the professors from Dublin might think. I looked again at the cap. Red. Red as a rose. Red as blood. Red as the lips of the woman in my dream.

"What's to lose?" I went below and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

got a fresh bottle of Paddy. I ran up the engine, then cast off and headed upstream. Laughing, I jammed the cap on my head. What's to lose indeed? No denying the blood. Mental cases, one and all of us.

Up river I found a rotting old fishing pier close to where I'd seen the woman. I tied off to a piling. What now? I didn't really believe anything was going to happen. The day was clear and the river still as glass. I listened to the water lap against the hull. I broke out Uncle Frank's fishing gear, and with breadballs for bait, tried my luck.

The time passed quickly. I caught three small browns, which I kept, and a large fat bream, which I released. It was almost dark. In the rhythmic ritual of fishing I'd forgotten about merrows and magic caps. I cleaned and cooked the browns for dinner. Tired, but with that sense of well-being which comes from a good day on the water, I smoked a last cigarette and watched the sun slide behind the mountains. Then I went below to sleep.

The boat rocked and I woke up. The full moon flooded the cabin with soft light. I glanced at my watch. Two a.m. I sat up abruptly. Someone was coming aboard. I threw back the blankets and swung my bare feet to the deck.

The cabin door opened. A naked woman stood before me. The moon made pearls of the water glistening on her white skin. She was small and perfectly formed. No tail or scale. A beautiful young woman with long blonde hair, standing bare before me in the dead of the Shannon night.

I stood, flat-footed, staring. What do you say to a merrow?

"Come in..."

"Thank you, sir." She moved forward.

"You're a merrow."

She looked at me, her eyes sad. "That I was ... and with God's grace, will be again. You've something of mine ..."

"The *cohuleen driuth*, you mean? I've got it..."

"Ah, that's a gift of grace then." She laughed and the tenseness went from her body. "Where did you learn such a strange name?"

"I was told by beán O'Meara."

"The O'Meara, was it? A misfortunate woman but a good friend of many. "

I realized that I too was standing there naked. Looking at her, I knew I would soon be calling attention to myself. I sat on the bunk and pulled a blanket over my lap.

She smiled. "I've seen a man before, you know. In my country we've no need to clothe ourselves."

"Uh ... yes...." What *do* you say to a naked merrow? "Uh ... won't you sit down?"

"I'll not refuse." She sat on the opposite bunk, our bareknees almost touching in the narrow cabin.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Do you have the cap for me then?"

The windbreaker was hanging on a peg over the bunk. I reached awkwardly behind me and pulled out the cap. She took it and held it to her breast. There were tears in her eyes.

"You've saved my life, you know."

"Not me. It was the old woman. I didn't believe her."

"But you came." Her soft, warm hand touched my knee. She brushed her hair back and put the cap on. "There. A bit comical isn't it?"

I laughed. A gold and white vision from the sea with a Christmas stocking on her head. She stood up and pulled the cap off. "I've no need of this here." She dropped it on the bunk.

Her fingers touched the scars on my arm. For once I didn't pull away. "You've been badly done there ..."

"I can live with it."

"Can you now?" She sighed, "It's wondrous things men do to each other. God knows this island has seen enough of it."

Her breasts were disconcertingly close to my face. "It's different then in your country ... Tir-Faoi-Thonn?"

"That it's not. We are all God's creatures. There's no perfection for any of us ... not even the angels." I could smell the faint perfume of her skin, salt wind on a warm sea.

"You came to me ... and I came to you." Her voice was soft. "There's little enough one can do for another in this life."

She pulled my head forward. Her breasts were firm and sweet as apples.

I woke once in the night to feel her silver-shot hair spread over my chest. I move in the narrow bunk, easing a cramped leg.

Her eyes opened. "Do you believe in the merrow now?"

I stroked the curve of her spine. "I believe. But you know, I haven't yet heard your name."

"My name, is it? God save us from what you'll be wanting next." She gave me a small sharp nip on the side. "My given name you'd not get your tongue around. But my family name you already know."

"I do?"

"Of course you do. The same as your boat. I'm of the clan McLir. That's what got me into trouble. When I saw the name I was curious. I got too close and that great machine of yours pulled the cap right off my head."

She stroked my face with her hand. There was a webbed membrane stretched between the knuckles of her fingers. I turned on my side and pulled her closer. It was the only difference I noticed, and no significance at the time.

I woke to the slap of the hull against the piling. I sat up, alone in the bunk, then pulled my clothes on and went above. The deck was dry under a low, cloudy sky. Not a sign on the boat, no

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

magic bit of seaweed, no wet fairy prints on the deck. The unnamed McLir was gone.

Perhaps it had been a dream, the slipping cogs of a crippled psyche. I went below and searched the cabin. The cap was gone. I came back up and sat staring over the wind-chopped water. At last, cold and depressed, I cast off and headed downstream.

There was a mist in the air when I sighted the Lanesboro bridge. I could barely see the faded letters of the warning signs. I felt a sense of lassitude, a bone-weariness. I wanted off this island and back to the States. I slammed the throttle forward. On to Glassan. In the morning I'd leave the boat at Athlone. By tomorrow evening I'd be winging out of Shannon airport and on my way home.

Distant rain squalls stitched the surface of the lake. Visibility dropped. I turned on the running lights. Whitecaps were rising and spray began to break over the bow. Loose gear crashed in the galley. Despite the cold I was sweating.

I couldn't see the shore. My chances of getting to Glassan were nil. I'd have to go back to Lanesboro. I gave it left full rudder and shoved the throttle to the stop.

The boat swung around. The engine shuddered and died. I tried to restart it as the quartering waves began to slam the boat. No luck. I dropped to my knees and tore off the hatch cover. I fumbled in the wheel locker and found a gunwale. I braced myself and peered down. The plastic dome of the filter was jammed with weeds.

I tucked the flashlight under my right arm and tried to loosen the wing nut. It was jammed. The boat pitched and a rush of water spilled over the side. Looking up, I could see that I was beam to the waves. I needed a tool to get the wing nut off the filter pot. Another wave hit, jolting me against the wheel.

I knew I was in real trouble. If I could keep the bow into the wind, I might be able to work on the engine. The only chance was to get the anchor out. If I could find bottom, it would pull the bow into the wind.

I staggered forward. Braced against the pitch, I let go the anchor. A wave hit the bow and I lurched back. A wet blue nylon tentacle seized my legs. Above me a vision of dark boiling clouds as I was pulled from the deck. Down into the cold roiling water of Lough Ree.

Into the black water, the pull of heavy steel cutting the line into my legs. Lungs fired, I jerked at the line, the dream shrouds of a streamered 'chute. I felt the snap of bone. My oxygen-starved brain saw a burst of yellow light ... the night fantasy of a pearl-skinned woman with rose-red mouth, screaming a soundless scream, now not screaming. Behind her, white faces, other bodies swift in the night water. Cold hands on my face.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My eyes opened to a moon-scoured sky. The pain hit me. Up the leg, lancing the brain. I screamed. A white muscular body appeared above me, pushing me down.

"He's alive ... awake...." Men's voices. I shoved against a slippery wet surface. The voices faded in and out. "The Barren Swan ... the Barren Swan...." There was a sharp prick to my shoulder. Down again into a warm sea ... floating ... yellow lights and-peace. A last vision of the moonlit hair of the woman McLir.

Yellow light again. Pressing against my eyelids, warming the skin. The sun was full on my naked body stretched out in the cockpit. At first I dared not move, remembering the pain. There was only the coarse feel of the deck beneath me.

I willed my legs to move. They moved. I rolled to push myself up, then stopped. I was pushing with my right arm. I felt for the jagged scars which ran from shoulder to elbow. There were none. I jumped to my feet. I stroked my arm. I clapped my hands ... both of them. I shouted, arms waving. My voice sounded over the deserted lake. No answer. Before me was a small v-shaped island. The boat rocked in the gentle breeze, the bowline tied to a wisp of a rowan tree. I sat down on a locker, flexing my fingers ... not five but all ten. And I cried.

I live now at *Cnoc Grianan*. A great advantage, for the enlightened Irish have no income tax for artists.

Uncle Frank thinks the recovery of my arm is a miracle of modern medicine. I wouldn't try to disillusion him. When I bought the boat from him, I asked him about the name.

"You are an uneducated sort, aren't you? Manannan McLir ... that's the old sea god. The King of the 'Country Under The Waves'".

"What do you know about the 'Barren Swan'?"

"Barren Swan? Barren Swan? Sounds like the name of a pub." He thought for a moment. "God save us from such ignorance," he laughed. "You must mean 'Bar an Suán'. That's the 'pin of slumber' in the old mythology...."

A few months ago I met Ed Devlin in Dublin. We had lunch together and I asked him about beán O'Meara.

"That's a strange story. It was right after you met her. Poor old dear passed away. God rest her soul."

"What's strange about that? She might have been a hundred."

Ed paused. "I'll tell you ... but you mustn't breathe it to another soul. There's only me and Father Fitz and the bishop who know. We all thought she was as poor as a tinker. But she left a great chest of gold coins to the parish. There was only one condition ... that she be buried in Lough Ree."

"What's wrong with that?"

He downed his drink. "Use your head man. The authorities would not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be keen about dropping bodies in the lake, would they? What would the tourists think?"

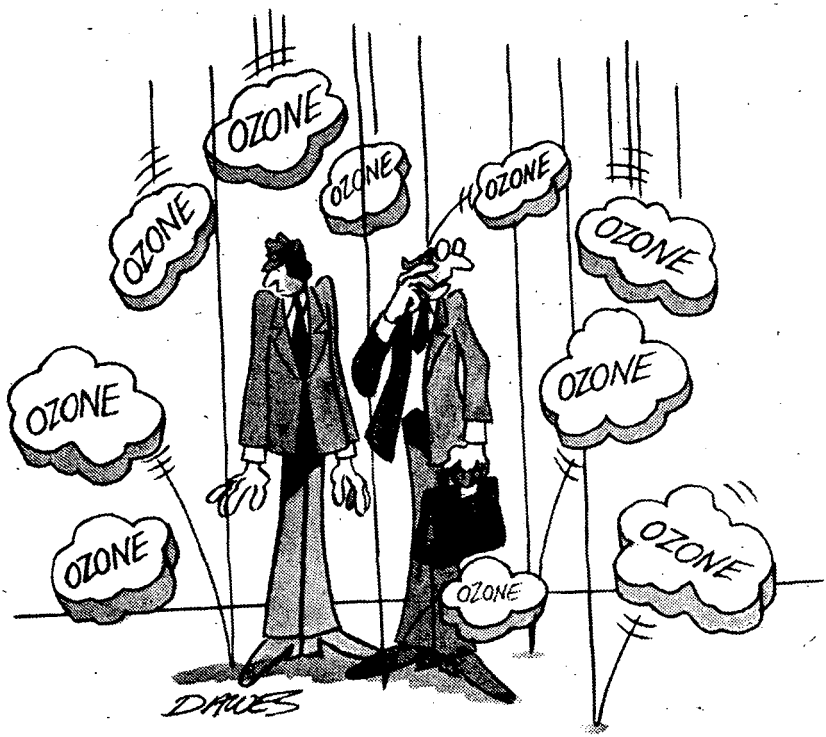
"You dropped her in the lake."

"Me and Father Fitz. We didn't just shove her over the side you know. Poor misfortunate thing. When we put her in the coffin was the first time I'd ever seen her without her gloves."

"What do you mean?"

"The poor woman had a deformity. Webbed like a duck between her fingers...."

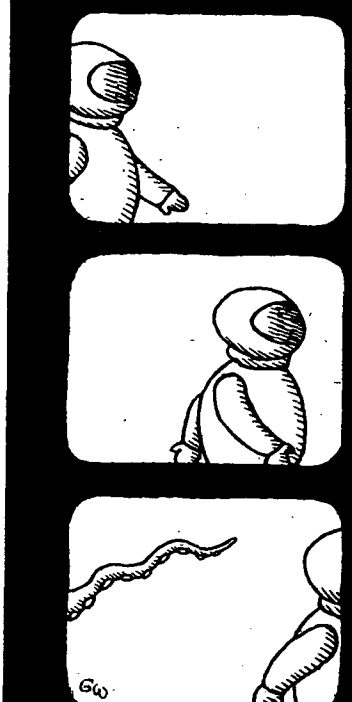
I keep the *Manannan McLir* at Carrick-on-Shannon. Whenever I can I take her out. I've a favorite spot above Lanesboro. I tie up to some old pilings and fish. I haven't had much luck, but I keep trying. At least I haven't yet caught what I'm looking for.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Films

BAIRD SEARLES



Drawing by Gahan Wilson

KHAN-FOUNDED

Star Trek lives. Sort of. I'm afraid that the second movie spinoff, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, while probably not delivering a *coup de grace*, is far from a rejuvenation treatment either.

First off, let me establish that I'm not an ST snob. I enjoyed much of the series first run, then, due to the fact that reruns in my area were always at unlikely times, saw very little of it until this past year when the series was programmed at a likely time, i.e. after midnight.

Then it was fun renewing my acquaintance with the crew of the Enterprise, which is now spiced with the inescapable overtones of fame, promulgated by the dogged fans; the show, like it or not, has entered the mythology of our time. Even without that aspect, I'm often pleased and surprised at how well many of the episodes hold up. Production values, of course, are primitive by current standards (I'm heartily sick of their all-purpose planet of artificial rocks), but when you consider that they were doing one a week, the often imaginative sets and costumes seem something of a miracle. For its time and place ('60s mass media), it was an accomplishment.

But we are in the '80s now; we have *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back* behind us. The new Star Trek comes burdened with the weight of its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own mythology. Should it be judged as the latest manifestation in a multi-media (TV, books, films) series, or as a contemporary movie? Is it good Trek? It is good science fiction? Is it a good movie? The answers to those questions are not necessarily the same.

I saw it a short time after it opened, and in the interim felt a cold chill on hearing that the Trekkies and the mainstream movie critics were adoring it. Now that *is* being a snob, but with some justification.

Star Trek aficionados tend to be conservative. The show is a part of their childhood, and like all such known and loved experiences, shouldn't be fooled with. The generally tepid response to the first ST movie was because it was trying to be something else (more on that below), and what was really wanted was another TV episode, just bigger and longer.

As for the mainstream critics, anyone into science fiction should know the acute discomfort brought on by most of them talking about an s/f film. They don't know the genre or its standards — nor should they, necessarily — but they usually have a firm idea of what such a film *should* be, and tend to get skittish if it varies from the cliché view of the sci-fi flick. Contrariwise, if it is easily identifiable — such as a longer, bigger Star Trek episode — they're happy.

So both groups got what they wanted. *Star Trek II* is cast in the image of the series. As everyone knows, it is a direct sequel to the episode, "Space Seed" (which our enterprising local station which carries ST showed in prime time a few days after the film opened — for once, somebody was thinking). Khan,, a freeze-dried Führer from the late 20th century, is discovered in a derelict ship in interstellar space with a group of his followers. They are revived, and thereupon take over the Enterprise with the intent of taking over the Universe.

Our gang prevails over Khan's superior talents, and he is exiled to a primative but livable world.

In *ST II*, Khan is found again, takes over a ship and goes off to take over the Universe, this time with a device invented by an ex-flame of Kirk's. Its specifications are pretty vague, but it seems to combine the functions of a super time bomb and the Old Testament Jehovah; just trigger it, and before you can say "without form, and void," there's instant life-covered planet out of a sterile rock. Trouble is it zaps every other life form in the vicinity.

Admiral Kirk and the regulars just happen to be out with the Enterprise and a crew of raw recruits on a training mission. They run into the Khan contingent, and there are the usual shoot-outs, stand-offs, face-offs, burned out shields, and power failures. Inevitably, Khan triggers the device, the Enterprise has to get out of the area in three minutes, and Spock gets himself fatally burned readjusting the spark plugs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And, as so often in the series, there's a personal subplot, in this case Kirk going through midlife crisis, not helped by the old flame's young assistant who is their (presumably) wrong-side-of-the-blanket son.

So what we have here, with the exception of Spock's death, is a longer, and just slightly bigger, series episode. Even the pacing and rhythm is small screen — one expected a commercial every 15 or 20 minutes — and the sets and special effects were not very special and none too effective; one has seen them before. The writers, in both the initial show and the movie, kept trying to convince us that Khan had some nobility, but he's a boringly one-dimensional villain, just enough for an hour episode, perhaps. Ricardo Montalban played the role for more than it was worth.

The movie had its good moments. The traditional byplay among the three major characters was as lightheartedly acid as ever, with more real wit than one is used to. The costumes are many, varied and beautiful. And I liked Kirstie Allen as a handsome female Vulvcan cadet, who injected real personality into the regular deadpan.

Star Trek, the Motion Picture tried to be just that: a motion picture. Taking *2001* as its model, it dared to be big, beautiful, and leisurely, and to transcend its TV space-opera antecedents. I think it succeeded. But apparently this is not what the majority of customers wanted. The title of *Star Trek II* also says it: "The Wrath of Khan" is an episode title. It would have been mildly diverting on the small screen. It was much less so on the large.

MERCURY PRESS, Inc., Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753
Please send _____ copies of THE BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, 24th Series, edited by Edward L. Ferman, limited hardcover edition signed by the editor. I enclose $14.95 per copy, which includes postage and handling.

NAME _____

STREET _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

SEE AD ON INSIDE FRONT COVER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Connie Willis wrote "Mail Order Clone," August 1982. Here is something quite different, a fine and haunting tale about a man who attends his own funeral...

Service for the Burial of the Dead

BY
CONNIE WILLIS

I should not have come, Anne thought, clenching her gloved hands in her lap. She had come early, so that she could sit well to the back of the church for only a moment, to take a deep breath and put her head up proudly, and in that moment old Mr. Finn had swooped down on her, taken her arm, and led her to the empty pew behind the one tied off with black ribbon for the mourning family.

I should not have come alone, she thought. I should have made my father come. Even as she thought it, she saw her father's red and angry face as she put on her black bonnet.

"You are going to the funeral then?" he had said.

"Yes, Father." She had buttoned her gray pelisse over her gray silk, tied her chip bonnet under her chin.

"And not even wear black?"

She had calmly put on her gloves. "My black cloak is ruined," she had said, thinking of his face that night when she came in, the black wool cloak soaked with frozen rain, the hem of her black merino heavy with mud. He had thought she'd killed Elliot even then, before the news that he was missing, before they had started dragging the river. He still believed it and would have shown it in his red, guilty face when he walked her down the aisle at the funeral. He would at least have walked her to a safe corner, protecting her from the talk of the townspeople, if not their thoughts. Perhaps they thought she had murdered Elliott, too, or perhaps they only thought she had no pride, and that, at least, was true.

She had lost what little pride she had that night, waiting on the island for Elliott. She had not even thought what it would mean when she agreed to meet him. She had thought only of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wearing her warmest clothes against the November rain, the black merino, the black wool cloak, her sturdy boots. Only after she had stood in the rain for hours under the oak tree, its bare branches no protection from the wind and the approaching dark, had she thought what a terrible thing she was doing. When he comes, I must say "no," she thought, the winter rain dripping off her ruined bonnet.

He had no intention of throwing Victoria over as he had thrown her over. Victoria was small and fair and had a wealthy father. The marriage was set for Christmas. Victoria's brother, now at sea, had been sent for to be best man at the wedding. Elliott had not even been kind enough to tell her of his engagement. Her father had told her. "No," she had said, and thought as she said it that it must be true because she had never, in all the time she had loved Elliott, been able to say "no" to him.

Was that why she had agreed to meet him on the island? Because she still could not say "no," even when it meant her downfall? It did not matter. He had not come. She waited nearly all night, and when she crept home, chilled to the bone, she knew she would not have been able to say "no" if he had. She could summon no anger at him, and when they found his boat, no grief. She did not feel anything, and that had helped her walk with old Mr. Finn to the front of the church, her eyes dry, no guilty color in her cheeks.

But I cannot, cannot sit here and face Victoria, she thought. I cannot do that to her. She has never done anything to me.

It was already too late for her to walk back down the aisle. There was a side door quite close to her that the minister entered by. It led down a hall to the choir's robing room and the vestry. There was a door just outside the vestry that led to the side yard of the church. If she hurried, she could escape that way before Reverend Sprague brought the family in.

Escape. Was that how it would look? The murderess overcome by guilt? The discarded sweetheart overcome by remorse, or grief, or shame? It doesn't matter what they think, Anne thought. I cannot do this to Victoria.

She put her gloved hand on the back of the pew in front of her. Behind her a man coughed, trying to muffle the sound with his hand. Anne pulled her handkerchief from her muff and put it to her mouth. She coughed twice, paused, coughed again, and stood up and walked quickly to the side door.

She shut the door behind her and hurried along the drafty hall, shivering in the thin silk and the light pelisse.

"Let us pray," Reverend Sprague said, and she found herself almost upon the family. They stood in a dejected little knot, their heads bowed, Victoria and her father, Elliott's father. The face of Elliott's father was gray, and he leaned heavily on his cane, his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyes open and staring blindly at the wall.

Anne backed hastily down the hall to the robing room. The door was locked, but there was a large key in the keyhole. She turned it, rattling it loudly in her haste. "Amen," she could hear Reverend Sprague say, and she pulled the key free, opened the door and slipped inside, pulling the door to behind her. It was very dark. Anne felt along the wall for a lamp sconce. Her foot brushed against something, and she bent down. It was a candle in a metal holder. Two phosphorous matches lay in the candleholder, and she struck one, lit the candle, and still kneeling, looked at the room.

It looked as if it had not been used in years. Reverend Sprague did not approve of robes and other "papist trappings" except at Christmas. The black robes hanging on their pegs were heavy with dust. Two black-varnished pews stood against one wall, and several wooden chairs. Anne stood up, holding the candle. She shook the dust from the hem of her dress and went to the door. The organ had begun.

She blew out the candle and set it on one of the dusty pews, still listening. The organ stopped and then started again, and she could hear the low rumble of the congregation singing. She felt her way to the door and opened it a little to make certain no one was in the hall. Then she let herself out and replaced the key in the lock. The organ ground into the amen. She nearly ran down the hall.

Anne was almost at the door before she saw the man. He had just come in and had turned to close the door gently behind him. Anne did not recognize him. He had reddish-brown hair under a soft, dark cap and was wearing a short dark coat and heavy boots. Victoria's brother, Anne thought, and waited for him to turn.

He seemed to be having some trouble with the door. He could not seem to shut it, and when he straightened, Anne could see a thin line of light where the door was still open. The man turned around.

"Elliott," Anne said.

He smiled disarmingly. "You look as though you'd seen a ghost," he said. "Did I frighten you?" he said, as though he were amused at the idea. The organ began again.

"Elliott," she said. He didn't seem to hear her. He was looking toward the sanctuary. Under the dark open coat he was wearing a white silk shirt and a black damask vest. Anne thought of her own ruined cloak. He had not come to meet her after all. He had left her standing on the island in the rain all night long. He had left them all thinking he was dead. "Where have you been?" she whispered.

"Away," he said lightly. "When you didn't come to meet me, I decided to go up to Hartford. What's going on in there? A funeral?"

"Your funeral," she said. She could not get her voice above a whisper. "We

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thought you were drowned. They dragged the river."

"I have always liked funerals," Elliott said as if he had not heard her. "The weeping fiancée, the distraught father, the minister extolling the deceased's virtues. Are there flowers?"

"Flowers?" Anne said blankly. "They found the boat, Elliott. It was all broken apart."

"Of course there are flowers. Hothouse lilies. Victoria's father will have sent all the way to New York for them. Well, he can afford it. Tell me, are little Vicky's pretty gray eyes red from weeping?"

Anne did not answer him. He turned suddenly away from her. "As you won't tell me anything, I shall have to go see for myself." He started down the hall, his boots making a terrible noise on the wooden floor.

"You mustn't go in there, Elliott," Anne said. She started to put her hand on Elliott's arm, but she drew it back.

Elliott wheeled to face her. "First you won't meet me on the island, and now you keep me from my own funeral. Yet you never said 'no' to me when we met on the island, our island, last summer, did you, sweet Anne?"

"I did meet you..." she stammered. "I waited all night ... I ... Elliott, your father collapsed when he heard the news. His heart..."

"...might stop at the sight of me. I should like to see that. You see, sweet Anne, you give even more reason to attend my funeral. Unless you are trying to keep me to yourself. Is that it, Anne? Are you sorry now you didn't meet me on the island?"

She stood there, thinking miserably, I cannot stop him. I have not ever been able to stop him from doing anything he wanted.

He had turned and was nearly to the door of the sanctuary. "Wait," Anne said. She hurried to him, brushing past the door of the robing room as she did. The key clattered out of the lock, and the door swung open.

Elliott stopped and looked at the key on the floor between them. "You would lock me in a hideaway and keep me all to yourself, is that it?"

"You mustn't go in there, Elliott," she repeated stolidly, thinking of his father leaning on his cane, of Victoria's bent head, of Elliott's easy smile when he went into the sanctuary to greet them. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost," he would say lightly, and watch the color leave his father's face.

"I won't let you," she said.

"How are you going to stop me?" he said. "Did you plan to lock me in the robing room and come to me at night, as you came to the island last summer? If you long for me so much, how can I resist you? Very well, sweet Anne, lock me in." He stepped inside the door and stood there smiling easily. "It is sad that I must miss my own funeral, but I do it to please you."

The organ had stopped again, and in the sudden silence Anne knelt and picked up the key.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Elliott," she said uncertainly.

He folded his arms across his chest. "You want me all to yourself. Then you shall have me. No one, not even Vicky will know that I am here. It will be our secret, sweet Anne. I will be your prisoner, and you will come to me." He gestured toward the door. "Lock me in, sweet Anne. The funeral is nearly over."

Anne looked at the heavy key in her hand. There was a sudden burst of music and singing from the sanctuary. Anne looked uneasily toward the sanctuary door. In a moment Reverend Sprague would open that door.

"You will come, won't you, Anne?" Elliott said. He was leaning against the wall. "You won't forget?"

"There's a candle on the pew," Anne said, and shut the door in his face. She turned the key in the lock, and then, not knowing what else to do, thrust the key into her muff and ran for the side yard door.

She was too late. People were already spilling out the double doors onto the dead brown grass of the side yard. The biting wind caught the door and slammed it shut. Everyone stopped and looked up at Anne.

Anne walked through them as it they were not even there, unmindful of how she held her head, of how she looked in the gray pelisse and the guilty chip bonnet. She did not even hear the light footsteps behind her until a soft voice called to her.

"Anne? Miss Lawrence? Please wait."

She turned. It was Victoria Thatcher, her pretty gray eyes red with weeping. She was clutching a little black prayerbook. "I wanted to tell you how grateful I am you came," she said.

Anne was suddenly furious with her tear-stained face, her gentle words. He doesn't love you, she almost said. He wanted to meet me at night on the island, and I went. He's in the church now, waiting for me. He isn't dead, but I wish he were and so should you.

"Your kindness means a great deal to me," Victoria said haltingly. "I ... my father has just now gone to Hartford to attend to some business of Elliott's, and I have no friends here. Elliott's father has been kindness itself, but he is not well, and I ... you were very kind to come. Please say you will be kind again and come to tea someday."

"I..."

Victoria bit her lip and ducked her head, then looked straight up at Anne. "I know what they are saying about Elliott's death. I want you to know that I don't believe them. I know you didn't...." She stopped and ducked her head again. "I know you pray for his soul, as I do."

He doesn't have a soul, Anne thought. You should pray for his father and for yourself. And what is it that you don't believe? That I murdered him? Or that I met him on the island?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Victoria looked up at Anne again, her gray eyes filled with tears. "Please, if you loved Elliott, too, then that is all the more reason to be friends now that he is gone."

But he isn't gone, Anne thought desparately. He is sitting in the robing room laughing to think of us standing here. He is not dead, but I wish that he were. For your sake. For all our sakes.

"Thank you for inviting me to tea," Anne said, and walked rapidly away.

Anne went to the church after supper, taking ham and cake wrapped in brown paper. Elliott was sitting in the dark. "I had to wait until my father had his supper," Anne said, lighting the candle. "I had to sneak out of the house."

Elliott grinned. "It's not the first time, is it?"

She put the parcel down on the pew next to the candle. "You cannot stay here," she said.

He opened up the package. "I rather like it here. It is dry at least, too cold, but otherwise comfortable. I have good food and you to do my bidding. There will be few enough tears of joy at my resurrection. Why shouldn't I stay here?"

"Your father has taken to his bed."

"From joy? Has the bereaved fiancée taken to her bed, too? She never would take to mine."

"Victoria is caring for your father. Her own father has gone to Hartford to settle your affairs. You can't let them persist in thinking you are dead."

"Ah, but I can. And must. At least until Victoria's father pays my debts. And until you pay for not meeting me at the island."

"This is wrong to do this, Elliott," she said. "I shall tell."

"I do not think so," he said. "For I should have to say then that I had never gone on the river at all, but only hidden away with you. And then what will happen to my poor stayabed father and my rich Victoria? You will not tell."

"I will not come again," she said. "I will not bring you your supper."

"And leave the minister to find my bones? Oh, you will come again, sweet Anne."

"No," Anne said. "I won't." She did not lock the door, in the hope that he would change his mind, but she took the key. In case, she thought, without even knowing the meaning of her own words, in case I need it.

Anne's father answered the door before she could get halfway down the stairs. She saw the sudden stiffening of his back, the sudden grayness of his ears and neck, and she thought, It is Elliott.

She had gone to the church every night for three days, taking him food and candles and once a comforter because he complained of the cold, taking the same useless arguments. Victoria's father came home, spent a morning at the bank, and left again. Vic-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

toria went past every morning on her way to visit Elliott's father, looking smaller and more pale every day. There was still no word from her brother. On the third day she wrote asking Anne to tea.

Anne showed the note to Elliott. "How can you do this to her?" she said.

"To you, you mean. You accepted, of course. It should be rather a lark."

"I refused. You must think about what you are putting her through, Elliott."

"And what about what I've been through? In an open boat in the middle of the night in the middle of a storm. I don't even remember getting ashore. I had to walk halfway to Haddam before I was able to borrow a horse at an inn. Think what you've put me through, Anne, all because you didn't choose to meet me. Now I don't choose to meet them." He fumbled with the comforter, trying to cover his knees.

Anne had felt too tired to fight him anymore. She had put the packet of food down on the pew and turned away.

"Leave the door open," Elliott had said. "I don't like being shut in this coffin of a room. And tell me when Victoria's father comes back with all my debts honored."

He will never come out, Anne thought despairingly, but now, standing on the landing watching her father, she thought, He has come out after all, and hurried down the steps. When she reached the foot of the stairs, her father turned to her and said accusingly, "It is Miss Thatcher. She has come to call." He walked past her up the stairs. without another word.

"It was improper of me to come," Victoria said. "Now your father is angry with me."

"He is angry with me. You have done nothing improper, unless showing kindness is improper." They were still standing in the wind at the door. "Won't you come in?" Anne said. "I'll make some tea."

Victoria put her hand on Anne's arm. "I did not come to call. I ... now I must ask a kindness of you." She had not worn gloves, and her hand was icy even through the wool of Anne's sleeve.

"Come in and tell me," she said, and once more, she thought, It's Elliott. Victoria stepped into the hall, but she would not let Anne take her black cloak or bonnet, and when Anne went to shut the door, she said, "I cannot stay. I must go to Dr. Sawyer's. He ... a body has been found in the river. Near Haddam. I must go see if it is Elliott."

A tremendous wave of anger swept over Anner at Elliott. She almost said, "He is not dead. He's in the robing room," but Victoria, once she started, could not seem to stop. "My father has gone to Hartford," she said. "There was some trouble about gambling debts of Elliott's. My brother is still at sea. We have no news of his ship. Elli-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ott's father is too ill to go. My father went to his place in Hartford, and now there is no one to see to this. I cannot ask Elliott's father. It would kill him to see ... I came to ask your father, but now I fear I have angered him and there is no one else to...."

"I will go with you," Anne said, throwing on her gray pelisse. It was far too light for the cold day, but she was afraid to take the time to go back upstairs for something heavier for fear Victoria would be too distraught to wait. I cannot let Elliott do this, she thought. I will tell her what he has done.

But there was no chance. Victoria walked so fast that Anne nearly ran to keep up with her, and the words flowed out of her in great painful spurts, as if an artery had been cut somewhere. "My brother should be here by now. There's no word from New London, where they are to dock. He cannot have been delayed in port. But the storms have been so fierce I fear for his ship. I wrote him on the day that Elliott was first missed. I knew that he was dead, the first day. My father said not to worry, that he was only delayed, that we must not give up hope, and now my brother Roger is delayed, and there is no one to tell me not to worry."

They were on Dr. Sawyer's doorstep. Victoria knocked, her bare hands red from the cold, and the doctor let them in immediately. He did not take their wraps. "It will be cold," he said, and led them swiftly down the hall past his office to the back of his house. "I am sorry your father is not here. It is no work for young ladies." If they would only stop, she would tell them, but they did not stop, even for a moment. Anne hurried after them.

The doctor opened the door into a large square room. It made Anne think of a kitchen because of the long table. There was a sheet over the table, dragging almost to the floor. Victoria was pale. "I do not like this at all, Victoria," Dr. Sawyer said, speaking more and more rapidly. "If your father were here.... It is a nasty business."

Anne thought, As soon as she sees it isn't Elliott, I will tell them. Dr. Sawyer pulled the sheet back from the body.

It was as if the time, so hurried along by them, had stopped stock-still. The man had been dead several days. Since the storm, Anne thought. He was drowned in the storm. His black coat was still damp and stained like her cloak had been when she had tried to wash away the mud. He was wearing a white silk shirt and a black damask vest. There was a gray silk handkerchief in the vest pocket, wrinkled and water-spotted. He looked cold.

Victoria put her hand out toward the body and then drew it back and groped for Anne's hand. "I'm sorry," Dr. Sawyer said, and looked down at the body lying on the table.

It was Elliott.

***

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's about time you got here," Elliott said, getting up. He had been lying on the pew, his coat folded up under his head. He had unbuttoned his shirt and opened his black vest. "I've been wasting away."

Anne handed him the parcel silently, looking at him. There was a gray silk handkerchief in the pocket of his vest.

"Did you go to tea at Vicky's?" he said, unwrapping the brown paper from the slices of bread, the baked ham, the russets. He was having some difficulty with the string. "Comforting the bereaved and all that? What fun!"

"No," Anne said. She watched him, waiting. He could not untie the string. He laid the packet on the seat beside him. "We went to Dr. Sawyer's."

"Why? Is my revered father sinking, or does pretty Vicky have the vapors?"

"We went to see a body, to see if we could identify it."

"Ugh. A grisly business, I should imagine. Pretty Vicky fainting with relief at the sight of some bloated stranger, Dr. Sawyer ready with the smelling salts...."

"It was your body, Elliott."

She had expected him to look shocked or furtive or frightened. Instead, he put his hands behind his head and leaned back against them, smiling at her. "How is that possible, sweet Anne? Or have you been having the vapors, too?"

"How did you get from the river to Haddam, Elliott? You never told me."

He did not change his position. "A horse was grazing by the riverside. I leaped upon his back, the true horseman, and galloped home to you."

"You said you got the horse at an inn."

"I didn't want to offend your sensibilities by telling you I stole the horse. Perhaps I overjudged your sense of delicacy. You seem to have no qualms about accusing me of ... what is it exactly you're accusing me of? Murdering some harmless passerby and dressing him in my clothes? Impossible. As you can see, I am still wearing them."

"My cloak is ruined beyond repair," she said slowly. "My boots were caked with mud. The hem of my dress was stained and torn. How did you manage to ride a horse all the way from Haddam in a storm and arrive with your boots polished and your coat brushed?"

He sat up suddenly and grabbed for her hands. She stepped back. "You did all that for me, Anne?" he said. "Waiting on the island, drenched and dirty? No wonder you are angry. But this is no way to punish me. Locking me in this dusty room, telling me ghost stories. I'll buy you a new cloak, darling."

"Why haven't you eaten anything I've brought you? You said you were famished. You said you hadn't eaten for days."

He let go of her hands. "When

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

should I have eaten it? You've been here all this time, badgering me with silly questions. I'll eat it now." He picked up the paper packet and set it on his lap.

Anne watched him. His hands were windburned to a dark red. The body's hands had had no color. It was as if the river had washed it away.

Elliott fumbled with the brown paper on the bread. "Bread and cake and my own sweet Anne. What man could ask for more?" But he still didn't open the packet, and after a few minutes he replaced it on the seat. "I'll eat it after you've gone," he said petulantly. "You've made me lose my appetite with all this talk of dead men."

When she went back the next day, he was fully dressed, his gray handkerchief neatly folded in his vest pocket, his coat on. "What time's the funeral?" he said gaily. "The second funeral, of course. How many funerals shall I have, I wonder? And will I have to pay for all the flowers when I return?"

"It is this afternoon," Anne said, wondering as soon as she said it if she should not have lied to him. She had dressed for the funeral, thinking all the while she would not go see him, that it was too dangerous, concentrating on dressing warmly in her brushed and cleaned wool merino, on taking her muff. But the key was in her muff, and as soon as she saw it, she knew that she had meant to go see him all along. It was just like the day she had gone to meet him on the island. She had not cared about warmth then, only about not being seen, and she had dressed in her black cloak and her black dress, her black bonnet, as if she were going someplace else altogether. As if, she realized now, she were dressing for a funeral.

"This afternoon," he repeated. "Then Victoria's father is back from Hartford?"

"Yes."

"And my father, is he well enough to attend? Leaning on his cane and murmuring, 'A bad end. I knew he would come to a bad end.' Is it to be a graveside service?" Elliott said, picking up his hat.

"Yes," she said in alarm. "Where are you going?"

"With you, of course. To the funeral. I missed my first one."

"You can't," she said, and backed slightly toward the door, clutching the key inside her muff.

"I think," he said coldly, "That this little game has gone on long enough. I never should have let you dissuade me from walking in on the first funeral. I certainly shall not let you keep me from this one."

Anne was so horrified she could not move. "You'll kill your father," she said.

"Well, and good riddance. You shall have someone to bury then besides this poor stranger who is masquerading as me."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We are burying you, Elliott," she said, and there was something in his face when she said that that gave him away. "You know you're dead, don't you, Elliott?" she said quietly.

He put his hat on. "We shall see if my fiancée thinks I am dead. Or her father. How glad he will be to see me alive and free of debt! He shall welcome me with open arms, his son-in-law to be. And pretty Vicky, she shall be a bride instead of a widow."

Anne thought of Victoria's kind gray eyes, her little hand holding Anne's hand in the doctor's kitchen, of Victoria's father, grim-faced and protective, his hand on his daughter's shoulder. "Why are you doing this terrible thing, Elliott?" Anne said.

"I do not like coffins. They are small and dark and dusty. And cold. Like this room. I will not let them lock me in the grave as you have locked me in."

Anne sucked in her breath sharply.

"They will be so overjoyed they will quite forget what they have gone to the cemetery to do." He smiled disarmingly at her. "They will quite forget to bury me."

Anne backed against the door. "I won't let you," she said.

"Dear Anne, how will you stop me?"

She had not locked him in, not since the funeral. She had left the door unlocked each night in the hope that he would come out. "Leave the door open," he had shouted after her, but he had not opened it himself. When she went back the door was still shut, as if she had locked him in. "I will lock you in," she said aloud, and clutched the key inside her muff.

Elliott laughed. "What good will that do? If I am a ghost I should be able to pass through the walls and come floating across the cemetery to you, shouldn't I, Anne?"

"No," she said steadily. "I won't let you."

"No?" he said, and laughed again. "When have you ever said 'no' to me and meant it? You do not mean it now." He took a step toward her. "Come. We will go together."

"No!" she said, and whirled, opening and shutting the door behind her in one motion, pulling on the knob with all her strength till she could get the key into the lock and turn it. Elliott's hand was on the knob on the other side, turning it.

"Stop this foolishness and let me out, Anne," he said, half laughing, half stern.

"No," she said.

She put the key in the muff, and then, as if that had taken all her strength, she walked a few steps into the sanctuary and sank down on a pew. It was the one she had sat in that day of the funeral; and she put her arms down on the pew in front of her and buried her head in them. Inside the muff, her hand still clutched the key.

"Can I be of help, Miss Lawrence?" Reverend Sprague said kindly. He was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wearing his heavy black coat and carrying *The Service for the Burial of the Dead.*

"Yes," Anne said, and stood up to go to the cemetery with him.

The coffin was already in the grave. The dirt was heaped around the edges, as dry and pale as the grass. The sky was heavy and gray. It was very cold. Victoria came forward to greet Reverend Sprague and speak to Anne. "I am so glad you came," she said, taking Anne's gloved hand. "We have only just heard," she said, her gray eyes filling with tears, and Anne thought suddenly, He has already been here.

Victoria's father came and put his arm around his daughter. "We have had word from New London," he said. "My son's ship was lost in a storm. With all hands."

"No," Anne said. "Your brother."

"We still hope and pray he may not be lost," Victoria's father said. "They were very near the coast."

"He is not lost," Anne said, almost to herself. "He will come today," and she did not know of whom she spoke.

"Let us pray," Reverend Sprague said, and Anne thought, Yes, yes, hurry. They all moved closer to the grave as if that could somehow shelter them from the iron-gray sky. " 'In the midst of life we are in death,' " Reverend Sprague read. " 'Of whom may we seek for succor, but of thee, O Lord?' "

Anne closed her eyes.

" 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.' " It was beginning to snow. Reverend Sprague stopped to look at the flakes falling on the book and lost the page altogether. When he found it, he said, "Pardon me," and began again. " 'In the midst of life....' "

Hurry, Anne thought. Oh, hurry.

Far away, at the other side of the cemetery, across the endless stretch of grayish-brown grass and gray-black stones, someone was coming. The minister hesitated. Go on, Anne thought. Go on.

" 'That every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.' "

It was a man in a dark coat. He was carrying his hat in his hand. His hair was reddish-brown. There were flakes of snow on his coat and in his hair. Anne was afraid to look at him for fear the others would see him. She bowed her head. Reverend Sprague bent and scooped up a handful of dirt from the edge of the grave. " 'Unto the mercy of Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we commend the soul of our brother departed and commit his body to the ground, earth to earth....' " He stopped, still holding the handful of earth.

Anne looked up. The man was much closer, walking rapidly between the graves. Victoria's father looked up. His face went gray.

" 'Unto the mercy of Almighty God we commend the soul of our brother

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

departed,' " Reverend Sprague read, and stopped again, and stared.

Victoria's father put his arm around Victoria. Victoria looked up. The man began to run toward them, waving his hat in the air.

"No," Anne said. With the toe of her boot she kicked at the dirt heaped around the grave. The dislodged clumps of dirt clattered on the coffin. Reverend Sprague looked at her, his face red and angry. He thinks I murdered Elliott, Anne thought despairingly, but I didn't. She clenched the useless key inside her muff and looked down at the forgotten coffin. I tried, Victoria. For your sake. For all our sakes. I tried to murder Elliott.

Victoria gave a strangled cry and began to run, her father close behind her. Reverend Sprague closed his book with an angry slap. "Roger!" Victoria cried, and threw her arms around his neck. Anne looked up.

Victoria's father slapped him on the back again and again. Victoria kissed him and cried. She took his large hand in her small gloved one and led him over to meet Anne. "This is my brother!" she said happily. "Roger, this is Miss Lawrence, who has been so kind to me."

He shook Anne's hand.

"We heard your ship was lost," she said.

"It was," he said, and looked past her at the open grave.

***

Anne stood outside the door of the choir room with the key in her hand until her fingers became stiff with cold and she could hardly put the key in the lock.

There was no one in the church. Reverend Sprague had gone home with Victoria and her father and brother to tea. "Please come," Victoria had said to Anne. "I do so want you and Roger to be friends." She squeezed Anne's gloved hand and hurried off through the snow. It was nearly dusk. The snow had begun falling heavily by the time they finished burying Elliott's body. Reverend Sprague had read the service for the burial of the dead straight through to the end, and then they had stood, heads bowed against the snow, while old Mr. Finn filled in the grave. Then they had gone to tea, and Anne had come back here to the church.

She turned the key in the lock. The rattling sound of the key seemed to be followed by an echo of itself, and she thought for a fleeting second of Elliott on the side of the door, his hand already on the knob, ready to hurtle past her. Then she opened the door.

There was no one there. She knew it before she lit the candle. There had been no one there all week except herself. Her small-heeled footprints stood out clearly in the dust. The pew where Elliott had sat was thick with undisturbed dust, and in one corner of it lay the comforter she had brought him.

The toe of her foot hit against

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something on the floor, half under the pew. She bent to look. The packets of food, untouched in their brown paper wrappings, lay where Elliott had hidden them. A mouse had nibbled the string on one of them, and it lay spilled open, the piece of ham, the russet apple, the crumbling slice of cake she had brought him that first night. A schoolboy's picnic, Anne thought, and left the parcels where they were for Reverend Sprague to find and think whatever it was he would think about the footprints, the candle, the scattered food.

Let him think the worst, Anne thought. After all, it's true. I have murdered Elliott. It was getting very cold in the room. "I must go to tea at Victoria's," she said, and blew out the candle. By the dim light from the hall she picked up the comforter and folded it over her arm. She dropped the key on the floor and left the door open behind her.

"So there I was, all alone," Roger said, "in the middle of a rough sea, my shirt frozen to my back, not one of my shipmates in sight, when what should I spy but the whaling boat." He paused expectantly.

Anne pulled the comforter around her shoulders and leaned forward over the fire to warm her hands.

"Would you like some tea?" Victoria said kindly. "Roger, we're eager to hear your story, but we must get poor Anne warmed up. I'm afraid she got a dreadful chill at the cemetery."

"I'm feeling much warmer now, thank you," Anne said, but she didn't refuse the tea. She wrapped her hands around the warmth of the thin china cup. Roger left his story to jab clumsily at the fire with the poker.

"Now then," Victoria said when the coals had roared up into new flames, "you may tell us the rest of your story, Roger."

Roger still squatted by the hearth, holding the poker loosely in his rough, windburned hands.

"There's nothing else to tell," he said, looking at Anne. "The oars were still in the whaling boat. I rowed for shore." He had gray eyes like Victoria's. His hair in the firelight was darker than hers and with a reddish cast to it. Almost as dark as Elliott's. "I walked to an inn and hired a horse. When I got here, they told me you were at the cemetery. I was afraid you'd given up hope and were burying me."

His smile was more open than Elliott's, and his eyes more kind. His windburned hands looked strong and full of life, but he held the poker clumsily, as if his hands were cold and he could not get a proper grip on it. Anne took the comforter from around her shoulders and put it across her knees.

"You haven't eaten a thing since you got home," Victoria said. "And all that time in an open boat. I'd think you would be starving."

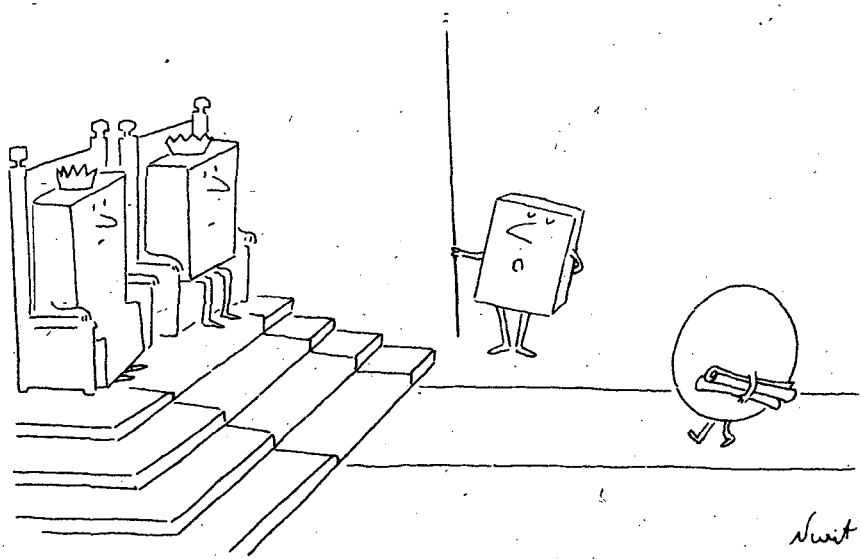
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Roger put the poker down on the hearth and took the cup of tea his sister gave him in both hands. He held it steadily enough, but he did not drink any. "I ate at the inn where I hired the horse," he siad.

"How did you say you found the horse?" Anne said, as if she had not heard them. She held out a slice of cake to him on a thin china plate.

"I borrowed it from the man at the inn. He gave me some clothes to wear, too. Mine were ruined, and I'd lost my boots in the water. I must have been a sorry sight, knocking at his door late at night. He looked as though he'd seen a ghost." He smiled at Anne, and his eyes were kinder than Elliott's had ever been. "So did all of you," he said. "I felt for a moment as if I'd come to my own funeral."

"No," Anne said, and smiled back at him, but she watched him steadily as he took the slice of cake, and waited for him to eat it.



"Senor Columbus!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In which the wizard Kedrigen and his beautiful Princess (in full voice) travel to the mysteriously evil Castle Grodzig to investigate a plague of enchanted rats.

The Hoppy Prince

BY
JOHN MORRESSY

Princess stood by the window, looking out to the west, where a beautiful late-summer sunset was blazing splendidly down the sky. Her little green book of vocabulary-building exercises lay where she had tossed it. Her hands were planted firmly on her slender hips, the fingers drumming a silent tattoo. A slight spot of color glowed on her perfectly-sculpted cheeks. The simple golden circlet on her brows was set at a determined angle. To Kedrigern, who had learned to read her moods, these were signs that the present one was not her best.

He cleared his throat, very softly. She did not speak, or even turn, but the color in her cheek glowed a bit more brightly.

"Is anything wrong, my dear?" he asked cautiously.

She turned and pinned him with wrathful eyes. "Yes, Kedrigern, something is very wrong, and you know exactly what it is that's wrong, and how many months it's been wrong, and how to set it right."

"If—"

"I've had my voice back for months now, and in all that time I haven't spoken to a soul but you and Spot. On the day I ceased to croak like a toad, and finally began speaking good sensible prose like any other woman, you promised me that our life would change. We would entertain. We would travel," she said, advancing on him. "There was a convention—"

"That's not until late in the fall."

"And we were to have visitors. The house was to ring with persiflage, raillery, quips and cranks and badinage, wit of all sorts, and merry banter. But not so, Kedrigern. There has been no one. No one at all."

He stepped back and bumped into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the table. Raising his hand defensively, he said, "I asked the wood-witch to come over just last week. She wasn't free."

"Always *your* friends. Why don't you invite any of *my* friends?"

"My dear, all your friends are still toads. Surely you wouldn't want—"

"Oh, that's right. That's the way to answer my questions. Be as cruel as you can be," she said, her melodious voice rich with scorn.

"Cruel?" Kedrigern repeated, bewildered.

"Go on, dig up the past, fling it in my face. Do everything you can to humiliate, degrade, demean, abase, and mortify me. Tell me once again how, if you hadn't happened along, I'd still be sitting on a lily pad in a dank misty bog waiting for the next fat fly to come along."

"My dear, I've never said such a thing."

"No, but you're always thinking it. You're ashamed of me, Kedrigern. That's why you're always running off to your study to work a spell, charm, cantrip, or enchantment. I don't think you love me any more."

"How can you say such a thing, my sweet?" Kedrigern cried. "Why, I love you more than ever!"

"You never say so any more. We never go out, or have company. I think you want to keep me hidden here, like a guilty secret. The magic has gone out of our marriage, Kedrigern," said Princess with a deep sigh.

"If the magic ever went out of our marriage, my love, you would at once become a toad," Kedrigern said firmly.

Princess gave a howl of anguish and buried her face in her hands. "You're shouting at me!" she cried in a muffled voice. "You don't love me!"

Actually, Kedrigern loved Princess just this side of uxoriousness, but he was not by nature or training a demonstrative man. A long — very long — lifetime spent in the solitary and often perilous study of magic had prepared him poorly for the crises of domestic life. He could face dragons, demons, and the vilest sorcery with aplomb. The sight of Princess in tears turned him to jelly.

"There, now, my sweet," he said soothingly, enfolding her in his arms, "you know I love you, and I'd do anything to make you happy. If you really want to get away for a while, we'll take a little trip. We'll go anywhere you like, and we'll meet people, and ... so forth."

She raised her head. "Really?"

"Really."

"When do we leave?"

Kedrigern hated to travel. He loathed little trips, and met no one it was not absolutely necessary to meet. His idea of a good vacation was a sunny afternoon's nap on a bench in his own dooryard, and an extra glass or two of fine wine with dinner. But he gritted his teeth, swallowed, and said, "Whenever—"

And then a loud knock sounded at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the door, followed at portentous intervals by a second, and then a third.

"Are we expecting anyone?" Kedrigern asked.

"We never expect anyone. It must be a client."

"Odd time for a client. I think I'd better answer it myself. Spot gives people a start," Kedrigern said, turning toward the front door. A small, grotesque figure went bounding past him, and he called to it, "No, Spot, I'll see who it is. You get back to the kitchen."

"Yah!" the little house troll yelped obediently, pivoting on one huge flat foot and returning whence it came.

Kedrigern worked a quick protective spell — it was best to be cautious these days — and opened the door. Before him stood a tall, slender man dressed head to foot in black, blackbearded, with a black patch over one eye. Removing a black-plumed black hat, the fellow favored him with a sweeping bow.

"Master Kedrigern, I presume?" he said in a high-pitched, rasping voice.

"I am he."

"I am a servant of Prince Grodz. My master has sent me to seek the aid of your wisdom. He wishes you to come to Castle Grodzik as soon as possible."

"Well, I'm not sure what I can do for Prince Grodz, or when ... but come in, come in. You must be thirsty."

Kedrigern led the messenger inside. At the sight of Princess, the man in black bowed once again, with great flourishes of his plumed hat.

"This is my wife, Princess," said Kedrigern.

The messenger bowed a third time, and said, "I am overwhelmed by the presence of such beauty in the company of such wisdom. Surely I am unworthy to remain within these walls. I beg you to permit me to deliver my master's request and then withdraw while you consider it."

"Whatever you like. Are you sure you're not thirsty?"

"It is not for the servant of Prince Grodz to be thirsty," the visitor rasped.

"All right, then, don't be thirsty. What exactly is the problem?"

"A plague of rats is upon my master."

Kedrigern frowned. "I am not a ratcatcher, I am a wizard. Grodz wants a ratcatcher."

"Three ratcatchers have been summoned to the castle. All three have been devoured by rats."

"I see. Well, perhaps I ought to refer you to a colleague of mine who specializes in this sort of thing. Conhoon of the Three Gifts is his name. He's rid whole kingdoms of rats and mice and moles. My field is really a bit different. I deal in remedial magic, mostly. Counterspells and disenchantments and such."

"That is why my master seeks your aid, and not another's. This is no ordinary plague of rats. These are enchanted rats."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Are you sure?"

"They sing and dance on moonlit nights. They whisper unnerving phrases in the ears of sleepers. They write disrespectful words on the walls of sleeping chambers," the messenger said.

Kedrigern nodded thoughtfully. "That certainly sounds like enchantment," he admitted.

"My master had no doubt of it."

"All right, then, you can tell Grodz that I'll be—" Kedrigern began, stopping short when Princess tugged hard at his sleeve and shook her head irately. Recalling his promise, he nodded to her and went on, "—over to see him sometime in the fall. Before the first snow. He can count on me."

"By then, all of Castle Grodzik will be eaten to the ground. You must come now, or we are lost, my master says."

"I have another commitment and I can't break it," Kedrigern said, taking Princess' hand. "Sorry, but I can't make it before the fall."

"My master will be disappointed," said the messenger. There was a quaver of stark fear in his voice.

"It can't be helped."

"He has planned a great festival in your honor."

"Oh?" said Princess.

The messenger's words came out in a rush. "Feasting and dancing and the very finest wines. Beautiful clever maids and handsome brave men, all eager to praise you and drink your health. Sweet music and tasty delicacies at all hours — you need only request, and your smallest whim will be catered to. The invitation is, of course, extended to both of you; my master does not approve of separating families. The entire west wing of Castle Grodzik is at your disposal, hosts of servants to obey your every command, stay as long as you wish. Plus a gold piece for each dead rat."

"I do not accept payment by the rat," Kedrigern said indignantly.

"My master will pay you any way you wish. Only come and help us, I beg you," the messenger implored.

Princess squeezed Kedrigern's hand. He turned, and at the sight of her expectant smile, he nodded. "We will pack tomorrow and leave for Castle Grodzik the following morning. You may tell Prince Grodz to expect us," she informed the messenger.

The man in black went into a paroxysm of bowing, and the air of the room was quite filled with dust from the sweeping flourishes of his hat and cloak. Still bowing and babbling his gratitude, he backed out the door, ran to his waiting black horse, and galloped off to bring the good news to his master.

Kedrigern was silent and thoughtful at dinner, and all through the evening. Princess was so excited by the prospect of society that she kept a lively conversation going with no need of his assistance. It was not until the following evening, when dinner was over, and the packing almost com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plete, that she became aware of Kedrigern's reflective mood.

"Cheer up, Keddie," she said, sitting beside him and taking his hand in hers. "I know how you feel about traveling, but you'll enjoy yourself this time. You need to meet some new people."

"It's not the travel. It's Grodz."

"The poor man needs you. Think of all those awful rats nibbling away at his castle."

"The rat I'm worried about is Grodz. I've heard some very unpleasant things about Prince Grodz, and the goings on at Castle Grodzik."

"What have you heard?"

"They're only rumors, mind you, but one can't be too careful. He's said to be extremely cruel, and he has a reputation as a colossal lecher. Always trying to seduce other men's wives, they say. I really don't like the idea of bringing you to a place—"

"Keddie, you promised!"

"I know I did, my dear. But all the same...."

"Do you really think I could be seduced by a prince? A mere *prince*, Keddie, when I know a wizard loves me?"

"Well ... there could be danger."

"Nothing you couldn't handle," said Princess confidently.

He pondered for a moment, and at last, judiciously, he said, "No. No, there shouldn't be any problem that way at all. I'm worrying needlessly, I suppose. Been out of contact with people too long. Grodz will turn out to be a charming fellow, and we'll have a wonderful time."

"We will, Keddie. I'm sure of it."

"I certainly hope so."

"We probably won't have a minute to ourselves, but I think I'll bring along a few books just the same."

"Excellent idea," Kedrigern said crisply. "You've made impressive progress with your vocabulary builder. How are you doing with *Spells For Every Occasion?*"

"Not very well, I'm afraid," she confessed. "Some of the words are almost unpronounceable. And there's no one to practice on."

"It can be difficult at first, but don't give up, my dear. I think you have a natural talent."

"Thank you, Keddie," she said, kissing him gently, and then rising. "I do think we'd be wise to finish packing. We want to get an early start."

Kedrigern sighed and hauled himself wearily to his feet. He wished there existed some wondrous spell that would pack one's clothing, books, and minor necessaries in an instant, all neatly folded and properly arranged, and leave no essential item behind. There was not. He set to work.

The weather was fine, and the journey was uneventful. Princess and Kedrigern arrived at the gates of Castle Grodzik one dusty afternoon, and were admitted by a gatekeeper with a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wooden leg. They proceeded to the castle entrance, where their baggage was taken by scurrying men, all of whom lacked an ear, an eye, or a few fingers. A limping stable boy led their horses off just as a distinguished-looking man dressed in black emerged from the castle to greet them. He was missing one hand.

"Greetings to the illustrious wizard Kedrigern and to the beautiful Princess," he said. "I am Banderskeede, High Steward of Prince Grodz. I welcome you in his name. Did you have a pleasant journey?"

"Pleasant enough," Kedrigern murmured half-heartedly. He was already starting to feel homesick.

Princess, pinching his arm, smiled her brightest smile and said, "It was delightful, Banderskeede. Marvelous weather, and the scenery was gorgeous."

"The prince will be pleased to hear that. I will convey your satisfaction to him."

"Will we meet Prince Grodz? We've been so looking forward to it."

"The prince is occupied with affairs of state at the moment, my lady, but he requests the honor of your company at a private supper this evening."

"We'd be delighted," Princess said.

Banderskeede led them down broad corridors and up elaborate staircases to their quarters in the west wing. Their bedroom was the size of a very large inn. The canopied bed that stood against one paneled wall could have accommodated twelve restless sleepers in comfort. Rich tapestries decked the walls. The furnishings, though few, were exquisite.

"Is this satisfactory?" Banderskeede asked, ducking his head respectfully and rubbing his stump.

"It will do," said Kedrigern.

Princess pinched him again, harder. "It's lovely! You must tell Prince Grodz that we're overwhelmed by his graciousness and generosity," she said.

"I shall do so, my lady," said Banderskeede, bowing and backing from the room.

When the servants had brought their luggage, unpacked, and arranged everything to Princess' satisfaction, she dismissed them. Once they had limped and shuffled their way out, she made a slow circuit of the room, examining everything, looking into corners and behind tapestries, emitting little pleased sounds at the cleanliness and quality of all she saw. At last she joined Kedrigern on the broad balcony overlooking fields, river, and the distant blue hills. He was sitting in thoughtful silence, gazing up at the fair-weather clouds gently drifting southwards.

"Isn't it lovely, Keddie? Everything is so beautiful that I can hardly believe it," she said happily.

"The people aren't so beautiful."

"They're not bad, for peasants."

"I didn't mean that. I've never seen anyplace where so many people are missing bit and pieces. Haven't you noticed?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She thought for a moment. "Maybe they're just clumsy."

"Maybe. Or maybe Grodz is really as cruel as rumor makes him out to be."

"No, Keddie, that's impossible. A man of such impeccable taste could never be cruel."

"Good taste and cruelty are not mutually exclusive, my dear. One of the most exquisite pieces of craftsmanship I ever saw — a true masterpiece — was a headman's axe. The executioner had it made to order. Cost him nearly a year's wages, but he said it was worth the expense to work with good tools."

"I don't care about executioners, Keddie. They're a nasty lot any way you look at them. I can see that Prince Grodz is tasteful, seemly, decorous. genteel, and discriminating. There's no reason to believe that he's cruel."

Kedrigern did not press the point. They watched the sunset, which was spectacular, and then returned to their room to rest. A fire had been kindled against the chill of the late-summer evening, and Princess stretched out before it to read for a time before changing for supper. Kedrigern, a bit restless, took the opportunity to explore the west wing. He saw nothing, and heard nothing, to verify his vague suspicions, and returned to the bedroom with a petulant air.

Banderskeede arrived to escort them to the prince's private apartments. They walked down unfamiliar corridors in procession, with torchbearers before and behind, and Kendrigern was silent until they were ascending the broad staircase that led to Grodz's rooms; then he realized what had been bothering him.

He drew closer to Princess and whispered excitedly, "Something's wrong, my dear. I don't smell a rat!"

She turned and stared at him in confusion. "What on earth are you talking about, Keddie?"

"They wanted me to come here because the place was alive with rats, don't you remember? Well, have you seen, or heard, or smelt any sign of rats?"

"Maybe they left."

"Then why aren't the people celebrating? I haven't seen anyone who looks happy."

"Would *you* look happy if you'd been through a plague of magic rats?" she whispered.

That was a point worth considering. He grunted, frowned, and said no more for a time. But the absence of rats still troubled him. Another thought occurred to him, and he whispered to Princess once more.

"What about the big festival? I don't see any sign of other guests, or any decorations, or festive things. I tell you, my dear, something's wrong here."

"There won't be a festival until you get rid of the rats."

"But there aren't any rats!"

"Oh, of course there are, Keddie.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Don't be so suspicious."

"Then why haven't we seen any trace of them?"

"They're magic, aren't they?" Princess whispered impatiently. "You can't expect them to behave like ordinary rats."

Another good point. Instead of reassuring Kedrigern, it troubled him all the more. He could feel something wrong in the very air of Castle Grodzik. For all its taste, refinement, elegance, polish, grace — whatever else Princess might say of it — Castle Grodzik was an evil place. Something very nasty was going on here. But he could not say what it was, or where it was going on, or who was behind it.

He fingered the medallion that hung around his neck. On an impulse, he raised it to his eye, and peering through the tiny Aperture of True Vision at its center, he took a quick look around. Everything seemed to be just as it should be. Nothing appeared wrong, and this infuriated him. Something *was* wrong, and he wanted to know what.

By this time, they were at the door of Prince Grodz' private apartments in the north tower, and it was too late to work a spell without being obvious, and rather rude. Kedrigern thought of doing a quick protective magic for himself and Princess nonetheless, but he did not. After all, he could not be sure what he wanted to protect against: assassins? poison? trapdoors? No, he was being silly. He promised himself that he would look into things that night and, in the meantime, enjoy a good supper. If Grodz was as fastidious about cuisine as he was about decor, the supper should be a memorable experience.

Prince Grodz welcomed them himself, with a sweeping bow more graceful than any Kedrigern had yet encountered in this frequent-bowing household. Grodz was a large man, a bit soft around the jowls and ample about the waist; fleshy but not flabby, he was handsome in a way that struck Kedrigern as oily and a bit too precise. He wore a short black robe trimmed with ermine over a simple white shirt and loose black trousers tucked into high black boots that gleamed like polished shields. His black hair, long and curling, shone almost as brightly as the flame of the black candles that burned everywhere in the room.

"Welcome! A thousand times welcome to the beauty and the wisdom of the age!" said Grodz in a voice like flowing honey. He took Princess' hand and raised it to his lips, where he held it much too long for Kedrigern's aproval. Flashing a smile crowded with small yellowish teeth, he gestured to a table set splendidly for three, where gold and silver and crystal glittered in the dancing candlelight. "Forgive me the simplicity of this humble setting. I indulge myself in an evening with my most honored guests before the rest arrive and my duties as a host deprive me of the pleasure to be found in your

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

company," he crooned.

"It's exquisite!" Princess cried, clapping her hands together ecstatically. "Everything we've seen in Castle Grodzik so far has been sumptuous, elegant, luxurious, splendid — in a word, princely."

Kedrigern thought of other terms: pretentious, flashy, tawdry, garish — in a word, tacky. He said nothing, merely nodded noncommittally to Grodz.

"The generous approval of one so beautiful gratifies me beyond utterance, fair lady. But Master Kedrigern is silent. Tell me, Master," said the prince, turning to the wizard with a look of concern, "does anything displease or offend you? I will remove it at once."

Manners did not permit an honest answer. Kedrigern shook his head and said, "Oh, no. Everything's just fine."

"Ah. You reassure me, Master Kedrigern. I am unacquainted with the ways of wizards, for a moment I feared I has committed some gaucherie."

"Of course you haven't, Prince Grodz," Princess assured him. "Everything is superb. Absolutely superb."

"Again I thank you, gracious lady," said Grodz, offering his arm. "It is said by some that the view of the river by moonlight from this balcony has a certain uncommon beauty at this time of the year. Would you care to see it? And Master Kedrigern?"

"I'm not much for scenery," said the wizard.

"Ah. But you are fond of morels, I have learned. And if you lift the cover of that golden dish, you will find sautéed morels of unusual excellence. I am sure your lovely lady would not object if you were to sample them while she enjoys the view."

"Thank you, Prince Grodz. I love morels, but I don't often have a chance to enjoy them."

"Then indulge yourself, my dear Master. They abound on my lands. I will see that you have a generous supply to take home."

Grodz ushered Princess to the balcony. As soon as they were out of sight, Kedrigern, rubbing his hands in anticipation, lifted the golden lid of the chafing dish and savored the warm aroma that curled up to greet him. He closed his eyes and sighed. Sautéed morels were a weakness of his. He began to think better of Grodz. Underneath all that oily exterior, he might be a fine fellow. It was outrageous the way gossip could defame a decent man. And even if Grodz were a consummate swine, sautéed morels atoned for a staggering quantity of sin.

Kedrigern took up a crisp round bread and spooned a generous helping of morels on top. He took a bite; chewed it slowly, savoring the delicate taste, and moaned softly in sheer delight. Finishing, he took another round of bread, topped it in similar fashion, and consumed it in two bites. A third and fourth helping followed. Then, as he raised the fifth slice of bread to his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lips, a chill ran through him. He felt his limbs grow instantly numb. He tried to cry out, but his voice failed him; his paralyzed fingers could not work even a simple spell. Helpless, he crumpled to the floor. His mind was alert, but his body was devoid of all sensation. Drugged, he thought, and a chilling memory returned, of vague and shadowy rumors about Castle Grodzik that he had so casually dismissed. Husbands and wives entered, the stories said; and if the wife attracted the eye of the prince, no more was heard of them. Kedrigern knew that he had been an absolute and utter fool. Overconfident in his magic, he had never considered being prevented from using it. But a wizard who cannot speak or gesture is in serious trouble indeed.

He lay in impotent rage for a time, and then he heard Princess cry his name and rush to his side. Grodz raised her to her feet, leaned over the wizard, and said, "Some poisonous mushrooms must have been mixed with the morels. There is no other explanation. The cook will pay for this."

"But what about Kedrigern? What can we do for him?"

"I will have him carried to my chambers at once. My personal physicians will attend him."

"Oh, my poor Keddie! Can they save my Keddie?"

"Your husband will be up and about tomorrow morning, fair lady. If not, I promise you that the physicians will be flayed along with the cook."

"Flayed? Prince Grodz, you mustn't...," Princess said, shocked.

"One must keep up standards; otherwise, workmanship becomes slipshod. If you will permit me, Princess, I will summon men to bring your husband to my chambers."

Princess knelt beside Kedrigern, took his face in her hands, and gazed down on him with tear-filled eyes. He could not even blink to catch her attention. She kissed his forehead, and pressed her cheek to his. He heard her sobs, and he could do nothing.

Grodz returned with two sturdy, sullen-looking men. "This is Master Kedrigern, a great wizard and an honored guest in Castle Grodzik," he told them. "He has suffered a mishap with the sautéed morels. He is to be conveyed at once to my chambers and placed in the bed of Prince Vulbash. He is not to be dropped. Do you understand?"

They understood. They lifted Kedrigern by shoulders and ankles and carried him from the room. The last sounds he heard were Princess' muffled sobs and the comforting voice of Prince Grodz.

As they made their way from the apartment, Kedrigern began to reconsider his initial reaction. Certainly, Grodz was doing his best to make amends. Cooks did make mistakes. Rumors could not be trusted. And aside from the paralysis, he did not feel all that bad. Perhaps he had judged Grodz hastily.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then he became aware that they were going down, and had been going down for quite some time, flight after flight of stone steps. Down, not upward to the prince's chambers. Kedrigern began to feel much worse.

Somewhere deep below the castle the steps ended, and they entered a dark cell where the wizard was placed none too gently on a table, like a slab of meat. A torch flared to life somewhere out of his line of sight. He heard his two bearers settle into creaking seats, sigh with relief, and catch their breaths.

One said, "Time to get the bed of Prince Vulbash ready for the next guest."

The other gave a snuffly, sniggering laugh. "This one's been a long time coming. They'll make quick work of him."

"It's either feast or famine for that lot down there."

They were silent for a time. Then the first speaker rose, to the relieved creaking of whatever he had been seated on, and said, "Let's be about it, Jegg. Sooner we start, sooner we're done."

More creaking, and a great sad sigh, and the other man said, "Right enough, Thubb. Is anyone around to help us?"

"The other boys are all busy."

"I hope we can manage by ourselves. That lid gets heavier each time."

"We can handle it, Jegg. Come on."

Kedrigern, flat on his back staring at the shadowed ceiling, could see nothing of the goings on around him. He listened with the greatest attention, for the brief conversation between his guards had stirred a fragile hope.

His immediate problem was to stop Thubb and Jegg from doing whatever it was they intended to do. It seemed to involve lifting a lid. He had no idea what or where the bed of Prince Vulbash was, but he was certain that it was not a place he wanted to be. He had a feeling that it was the sort of bed that promises rest of a permanent nature. He had to escape it, and in his present state he had no recourse but to use his mind.

Unfortunately, mental enchantment was his weak point. As an apprentice, he had preferred working with his hands and therefore concentrated on gesticulatory magic. His advanced study had introduced him to verbal spells. Enchantments worked by the mind alone were a field he had left almost unexplored — and now they were his only hope.

He heard much grunting and muttered swearing, and the squeal of a rope in a pulley. Stone grated reluctantly on stone, raising a hollow echo. Grunting again, louder. Kedrigern gathered all the force he could and poured it into an elementary magic: he directed it to the object being raised by the two men, tripling its weight for an instant.

It was enough. He heard a great

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crash. The room shook, and resounded, and one of the guards gave a howl of pain.

"My back! My back's broke, Thubb! I told you we needed help!" shrilled the voice of Jegg.

"Easy, now, it's just a strain," said his companion.

"I can't straighten up, you fool! I'm ruined for life! If Prince Grodz sees me like this, and the lid still on, he'll toss me into Vulbash's bed with his own hands!" Jegg whined, his voice a nicely-balanced mixture of pain and terror.

"The prince wouldn't do that, Jegg."

"Of course he would! And he'd probably throw you down, too. Remember what he did to Drull and Moobie?"

An interval of profound silence followed, and then Thubb, in a chastened voice, said, "Let's get you out where I can take a better look at your back. Maybe I can do something. We want to fix you up right away, Jegg."

"Old Zinch, over in the west dungeon, is good with sprained backs. Can you help me over there, Thubb?"

"What about this one? We didn't get the lid open enough to drop him down."

They'll come up and get him, never fear, Thubb. They're hungry enough. He won't go anywhere. Come on."

Kedrigern heard footsteps, and then the slamming of a huge door, and then there was only silence. He did his best to move, but his body was inert. He was able to shift his eyes slightly, and blink, but voice and body were still lost to his control. He had exhausted his mental reserves, and now was completely helpless.

He heard scuffling and squealing and low small voices. There was a scratching sound very close, and then he felt a weight on his stomach, and on his chest, and suddenly he was looking into the beady black eye of a large gray rat.

"Skinny, but he'll do," said a little voice by his left ear.

"What do you think, Fred? Is he all right?"

"Looks good to me."

"You want to watch out for poison. That time they threw us the poisoned one, we lost some good chaps."

"You're always worrying, Jerry."

"Well, you can't be too careful, not when you're dealing with Grodz. Why didn't they chuck this one down to us, like the others, I'd like to know?"

"One of the jailers hurt his back. You heard him yelling."

"All the same, it looks queer to me."

"Oh, shut up and eat your supper, Jerry!"

The big rat on Kedrigern's chest had been silent all this time. He sat on his haunches, studying the wizard closely as he rubbed his forepaws together in a way that reminded Kedrigern horridly of a man washing his hands before tucking in to a hearty meal.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Here, now. Just a minute," said the gray rat. "I know this man."

"Introduce us, Alf, and then let's fall to," said a tiny voice, and general laughter followed.

The gray rat's glare silenced the merriment. "I only saw him once, and not for long ... but if he's the man I think he is, he can help us."

Kedrigern's heart gave a leap.

"Who is he, then, Alf?" a rat cried.

"Yes, Alf, let's hear who this fellow is!" demanded another.

"He's Kedrigern of Silent Thunder Mountain, that's who he is! He's a wizard!" Alf cried triumphantly.

Angry crowd noises rose all around, and Kedrigern's spirits faltered. Despite Alf's enthusiam, wizards did not seem to be popular with his fellow rats.

"Kedrigern knows more about counterspells than any other wizard alive, you silly twits!" Alf cried, rearing up and waving his forepaws dramatically. "He can change us back into men!"

"Can we trust him, Alf? It was a wizard turned us into rats, you know," someone said.

"You can trust Master Kedrigern," Alf said in the voice of a true believer, and Kedrigern silently blessed him for his good judgment.

"Look here, Alf, before we go getting our hopes up — is this Kedrigern alive?" another rat asked.

"Of course he's alive. Look at his eyes. And can't you smell the sauteed morels? That's how Grodz slips them the stuff. He'll start coming around in a few hours. Meanwhile, we'd better get him to a safe place before the jailers get back. The end cell is empty — we'll take him there. Jerry, you get the rest of the gang. Bob, you bring a few rags and bones and scatter them around, so the jailers don't get suspicious," Alf said briskly, in the manner of one accustomed to command.

In a very short time, Kedrigern was gliding down the dimly lit corridor, supported on the backs of twoscore husky rats. It was a much more comfortable way to travel than the method of his descent, and the rats were far more solicitous of his bodily well-being than Jegg and Thubb had been, but his mind was in a turmoil. He had no idea how long he had been helpless; it surely was more than an hour. According to Alf, he could expect to be paralyzed for several hours more. And what was to become of Princess in that time?

She was innocent and trusting; she would be defenseless against the oily guile of Prince Grodz. She was agile, but not strong; Grodz could easily overpower her and force his wicked will upon her. Even now ... no surely not until after dinner, Kedrigern told himself. If anything, Grodz would delay, gloating over his triumph, savoring her helplessness — the lovely butterfly fluttering ever neared the web while the bloated spider crouches, watching.

If Grodz only gloated long enough,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Princess might be rescued before the worst had befallen her. And if not, then Grodz would answer for it. And his answer would be long and complicated, Kedrigern promised himself that.

Under Alf's and Jerry's supervision, Kedrigern was deposited on a stone shelf in a dark cell. Foul-smelling straw was heaped over him to conceal him from view, and then there was nothing for it but to wait. Alf settled in the straw close by his ear. In a subdued voice, he explained the situation at Castle Grodzik.

"I know you won't care to wait around and listen to me once you're up and about, Master Kedrigern," said Alf very sensibly, "so I thought I'd tell you what's going on here while we're waiting."

"Tell him about that rotten wizard, Alf," said a thin little rat angrily.

"All in due time, Jack. You see, Master Kedrigern, we were brought here under false pretenses — as I daresay you and most of the others were. We were just finishing up a wall-and-moat job for Martinu the Inexorable, way up to the north, he is, when Grodz's messenger came and made us a staggering great offer if we'd come and do some very confidential work for the prince. Secret stairways, hidden passages — that sort of thing."

"We're very good at that, sir," said a large, placid rat at Alf's side. "Done a lot of that, we have."

"Right you are, Dan. Anyway, down we came to Castle Grodzik, and we worked on this place for three years. It was just after Prince Vulbash the Kindly had droppped out of sight and Grodz taken over. We installed some of the tidiest secret corridors and hidden passages you'll ever see, Master Kedrigern, and we were right proud of our work. Then when we asked Prince Grodz for our pay—"

"Rotten stinking old dirty wizard turned us all into rats!" Jack burst out bitterly.

"That's the truth of it, Master Kedrigern," said Alf soberly. "For a time we tried to harass Grodz into changing us back and giving us our money, but he was too much for us. He's a cruel, hard man, Grodz is. He drove us down here, down into the pit where he had flung poor old Vulbash, and he put that big stone slab over it. For a while, we thought we'd starve down there. It was bad times."

"Then he threw the wizard down," said Dan.

"It kind of goes against the grain, first time you does it, Master Kedrigern. But food is food, and we were hungry. And after all, we're rats."

Kedrigern sympathized, and wished he could say so. But all he could manage was a faint grunt. Small as it was, it sent Alf into a state of high exhilaration.

"Hear that, lads? He's coming around!" the rat cried in a joyous little voice. "We'll be men again before you know it!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kedrigern knew, and intensely felt, every passing second; but in truth it was not long before he could move stiffly and speak intelligibly. As he swept away the straw covering and pulled himself erect, the rats gathered in a semicircle, balanced on their haunches, looking up at him expectantly, like children clustering around a kindly visiting relative.

"You've saved my life, gentlemen, and — I hope — the honor of my fair wife. That part remains to be seen. But first, is everyone here?" he said.

After a quick check, Alf said, "All here, Master Kedrigern."

"Very well." Kedrigern extended his arms and looked down on his rescuers. "I want you to close your eyes tightly. Now, take five deep breaths, very slowly, and hold the fifth."

He began to murmur in a low monotone, working intricate figures with his fingers. The words came faster and faster, and then he brought his hands together with a loud clap, and suddenly the little cell was very crowded, as forty-seven husky working men, stonemasons and sappers and woodcarvers, stood where forty-seven rats had been an instant before.

Kedrigern raised his hands to still their happy uproar. Alf sprang to his side to assist him, whispering, "Quiet, lads! We don't want them to know anything just yet."

"Where do we start, Alf?" said one large man in a deep, slow voice.

"The armory, Dan. There's a passage that will let us in by a secret door. Once we're armed, we can spread out."

"Is there a way I can get to the west wing unseen?" Kedrigern asked.

"There's a private staircase, and a secret corridor that opens into the chimney corner. I'll show you the way."

"Thank you, Alf, and good luck. I'd like to be going with you, but when I think of Princess in that villain's clutches...."

"Say no more, Master Kedrigern. Just between us, I don't think we'll have much to do. We've heard plenty, scurrying about inside the walls. There's few in this castle willing to die for Grodz."

Alf led the way from the dungeons to a staircase landing, where he paused before a blank wall of rough stone. He studied the surface for a moment, then reached up and pressed three of the smaller stones in sequence. The wall swung open without a sound. Alf glanced at Kedrigern, a workman's pride in his eyes.

"Go to your left, up the staircase, and take the second door on the right," he told the wizard. "All you have to do is press. The doors all open from this side."

Kedrigern clasped Alf's hand firmly, and waved to all the others. "Good luck, men," he said, and turned to the left.

His torch revealed a surprisingly neat passageway: no dust, no bats, and scarcely a cobweb to be seen. It ap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

peared that the secret corridors of Castle Grodzik were busy thoroughfares.

At the second door he paused for a moment to choose his magic. Grodz was not going to get off easy, and if he had anyone with him, he was in for the same treatment. When he was set, he worked an all-purpose protective spell. Then he placed his fingertips against the door and pushed very gently.

It swung open silently. Kedrigern slipped into the chimney corner and crouched for a moment, listening. He heard no sound save the crackle and low mumble of the fire. He sidled around the flames and peered into the chamber. There was no evidence of disarray, no sign of pursuit and struggle. He wondered, for an instant, if Grodz had carried Princess off to his own chamber — and then he saw Grodz's black boots standing by the bedside.

He swooped into the chamber, arms flung wide, and cried, "Turn and face your doom, Grodz, dog of a usurper! It is I, Kedrigern of Silent Thunder Mountain, come to avenge—"

"Keddie!" cried a joyous voice behind him.

"Princess!"

She jumped from the chair by the opposite side of the fireplace. A slender black book fell to the floor unnoticed as she ran to Kedrigern's arms.

"You're well! He didn't hurt you," she said, her words muffled by kisses she rained on him.

"And you, Princess ... h didn't...?"

"No. But he tried."

Kedrigern gave a great sigh of relie and held her close for a time, too hap py to speak. She was safe, he wa alive, and Grodz was thwarted. Al was well.

"What happened to you, Keddie Did he poison you?"

"He put a paralyzing drug in th sautéed morels. He assumed that if couldn't speak or gesture, I'd be help less. And he was almost right."

"But you were too smart for him! she said, hugging him.

"I had some help. But what abou you, my dear? How did you escap him?"

"Well, Prince Grodz insisted on es corting me to our chambers. To pro tect me from the rats, he claimed. I re membered what you had said — abou not smelling a rat — and I was es pecially observant all the way here There wasn't a hint of a rat, so I bega to suspect Grodz."

"Clever girl. Excellent girl."

"But he behaved like a perfect ger tleman. He even insisted that I bolt th door from inside—"

"The devious swine," Kedrigern snarled.

"But my suspicions were aroused. changed into my robe, and sat by th fire, reading. Studying, actually. wanted to be ready. After a time, heard a noise, and there was Grodz standing by the bed, very quietl

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

removing his boots. He must have slipped in by a secret door, and when he saw the curtains drawn around the bed ... well, it didn't take long to figure out what he was planning to do, so—"

"The villain!"

"I let him have it. I read it straight from the book."

Kedrigern looked down into her proud, smiling face, astonished. "You let him have a stream of vocabulary? How could that...?"

"Oh, no, not vocabulary. I was studying the *other* book, Keddie," she said. She dashed to the book that lay beside the chair and brought it to him, displaying the words embossed in red on the black cover: *Spells For Every Occasion.*

"Wonderful, my dear! I'm proud of you, truly I am. Tell me, which did you use? How did it work?"

Princess, looking very pleased with herself, pointed coolly to the black boots at the bedside. "Why don't you ask Prince Grodz?"

Kedrigern walked over, peered into one boot, and finding nothing, looked into the other. There was Grodz, small and helpless and very very angry. Kedrigern let out a great roat of laughter, took Princess by the hands, and they danced in a ring around the boot.

Princess collapsed on the bed, laughing. Kedrigern looked down at Grodz and asked him cheerfully, "Well, Prince Grodz, how do you like it?"

The prince, enraged, attempted to hop out of the boot but fell back. He glared up at Kedrigern with his jeweled eyes and puffed himself out in his most threatening manner.

"Brereep," he said.

Coming soon

Next month: new stories by Richard Cowper, Phyllis Eisenstein, and a remarkable novelet by newcomer Wayne Wightman.

Soon: A. Bertram Chandler, Avram Davidson, Gene Wolfe, George R. R. Martin, Charles Grant, Michael Shea, James Tiptree, Jr., R. Bretnor and many others. Use the coupon on page 160 to give a gift or to enter your own subscription.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is an entertaining variation on the always fascinating notion of picking up a copy of next week's or next year's newspaper. In this case, a private detective is asked to investigate the appearance of an investors' newsletter which makes uncannily accurate predictions.

The Letter

BY

ANDREW WEINER

I was on my knees in front of the filing cabinet, squinting in the light of my flashlight to read the title on the microfiche, and still not quite believing my eyes. And then the lights went on.

"It was inevitable, I suppose," he said. "It was only a matter of time."

He was standing in the doorway. A tall and rather nondescript individual in a sweater and baggy pants, with close-cropped greying hair. He did not look much like a genius, but then I knew now that he wasn't. He did not look like much of anything, except a shabby middle aged man confronting a burglar, with a .38 in his right hand.

I stood up, very slowly, hands stretched away from my body.

"A matter of time," he said again, and laughed, a dry croaking kind of laugh.

I did not see much humor in the situation. But then, he was the one holding the gun.

"Your wallet," he said, gesturing with his free hand. "Slowly."

Slowly I pulled the wallet out of my jacket and tossed it across the floor. Slowly he stooped to pick it up, keeping the gun pointed at me all the time.

He flipped through it.

"Private investigator," he said. "Licensed in New York state. You're a little out of your territory, aren't you?"

"A little," I said.

"And not licensed for break-ins, I imagine?"

"Why don't you just call the police," I said and get this over with?"

"Oh, no," he said. "I don't think I would want to do that."

And somehow I got the feeling that more than my license was at stake.

I had never been in the office of the Chief Executive of a major corporation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

before. For that matter, I had never been in the office of the Chief Executive of a minor corporation either, unless you count my bookie.

The office was not that impressive. It was smaller than a football field, and the carpet didn't come up much above my ankles. As a dining table, the Chief Executive's desk would have seated no more than twelve. And the collection of modern art on the walls was somewhat less comprehensive than the Guggenheim's.

The Chief Executive hiked around his desk to greet me.

"Good to meet you Mr. Hendricks," he said. "I'm Lou Staefler."

As if there could be any doubt in the matter. Ignorant as I was in the ways of business, even I was thoroughly familiar with that craggy face. Staefler had probably been profiled more often in the news magazines, been interviewed more often on TV and testified at more government hearings than any other corporate executive alive. Every line of that face had become public property. He was Mr. Corporation.

In person, though, he was possibly even more impressive than on TV. Bigger, more vigorous, in all ways larger than life. He came across more like a movie star or a politician than a businessman. Although of course he had to be all of those things to survive as leader of one of our biggest corporations.

He motioned me to sit down on the couch, and sat facing me.

"You've probably wondered," he said, "why I asked you to come here."

That was something of an understatement. Even if one could conceive of Staefler requiring the services of a private investigator, it was hard to imagine him wanting to deal with anyone lower than President of Pinkerton's! I was way out of my league, and we both knew it.

"You come highly recommended," he said, "by my friend Bud Haskell."

Haskell was possibly the city's classiest divorce lawyer. I had worked for him on a number of occasions. Not exciting work, or particularly elevating, but it paid the rent. Was Staefler in the market for a divorce? I had always dealt directly with Haskell before, never with his clients.

"But you're still wondering," he said, "why I need a private investigator?"

I nodded.

"It's a little unusual," he said. "Unusual circumstances. Requiring complete discretion."

"I am nothing," I said, "if not discreet."

"So Bud tells me." He paused. "What do you know," he asked, "about market letters?"

"A little," I said. "They're like tip sheets, right? For investors."

"That's a fair description," he said, "in the sense that they typically claim knowledge of things to come ... of movements in the markets as a whole,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or in the prices of individual shares and commodities."

"Like the Wilks Letter," I said. "The guy who tipped the market crash last year."

"Tipped it or created it," Staefler said. "When a letter has enough influence, the two begin to blur. Wilks wiped a dozen points off the Dow Jones in half an hour. He took twenty million off the value of our own shares. With one little letter."

"You don't hear much about him these days."

"Oh, he's still operating. He's still got his followers. But he called wrong once too often. He lost it. Lost the power to stampede investors, thank God. But there's plenty more where he came from. Hundreds of them. It's a big business in itself. People will pay hundreds of dollars, even thousands, for what they believe to be inside information."

He walked over to his desk and picked up a bulging file folder. He started to pass its contents to me, item by item.

"This one is from Fairfax, Alaska. The guy is a platinum bug. And this one is from Portland, Oregon, specializing in gold and the activities of the Trilateral Commission. This one is into soy bean futures and laetrile. And this one .... A lot of these guys are just nuts."

He passed the rest of the pile. I leafed through them. The letters came in all shapes and sizes. Some were professionally printed and attractively laid out, others were crudely mimeoed. Some were businesslike and brisk. Others were full of long-winded editorials about big government and the coming economic apocalypse, or dotted with arcane references to sun spot cycles and sixty-year economic waves.

The price tags were almost as surprising as the contents — two-, three-, four-hundred dollars a year for a monthly letter. I didn't ask Staefler why people would pay that sort of money, but he told me anyway.

"In good times," he said, "people don't really give the economy much thought. But when things get shaky, they start to wonder what is happening to them. They start to grope around for the right button, the one that will make it work for them. They're scared and they're confused. They see their savings melting away. They have visions of pushing wheelbarrows of money down to the A and P.

"And who can blame them? It's a financial Disneyland out there. It's out of control, or it seems to be. The government and the banks keep on making predictions about what's going to happen, and somehow they're always wrong. Nobody knows what's going on anymore. So they don't believe us. They look elsewhere for the real lowdown. And they think they find it here.

"And of course," he said, "some of these letters are *right*. Not all of them, and not all of the time. But they're

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right often enough to make people come back for more, like a man playing a one-armed bandit."

For some reason, that simile irritated me.

"Variable reinforcement," I said.

He looked at me curiously.

"A basic Skinnerian paradigm," I said. "Performance is greatest when rewards are intermittent and variable."

"I forgot," he said. "You used to be a psychologist."

Obviously he had checked me out very carefully indeed — which was only to be expected.

"All right," I said. "You know all about me and I know all about market letters. What's next?"

He crossed to his desk again, and returned with a much thinner file folder, which he passed over to me.

"This is the most recent issue of a fairly new letter, the *Reeve One Thousand.*"

I opened the file. Inside was a fairly skimpy document, four typed pages stapled together. Like most of the letters it was marked NOT TO BE DUPLICATED. There were a couple of unusual features. One was the price, a very steep $2000 for twelve monthly issues. Another was the fact that the copy I was holding was numbered "112" in red ink in the upper right hand corner.

"What does this mean?" I asked, indicating the number.

"It means that I am subscriber number 112. And the letter is called the *Reeve One Thousand* because it accepted only the first one thousand applicants. No one else can sign up until someone drops out. As far as I know, very few people do."

"It's a lot of money," I said.

"And worth every penny," he said. "Let me tell you how I came to subscribe to it. About six months ago I got a mailing with the first issue, along with a covering note. The note invited me to check out six specific predictions made in the letter. I did. Every one of them was correct. I signed up immediately. Since then, I have approximately doubled my personal wealth."

"So what's the problem?" I asked.

"Personally, no problem at all. Professionally, many problems. Professionally, I must know where he gets his information. Two months ago, for example, he recommended buying shares of an obscure regional oil producer. Two weeks later, my own company announced an offer for outstanding shares of that company. Naturally, anyone who followed the advice of the *Reeve One Thousand* made a killing. The point is, *he could not have known that.* Even my wife didn't know that."

"He's always right?"

"No," Staefler said. "But he's right about 90% of the time. I had an analysis made of a number of leading market letters, testing out the accuracy of specific predictions. Most are no better than chance. The really good ones run between 60 and 70%. And then there's Reeve."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He's on a hot streak," I said.

"He's on an *impossible* streak," Staefler said. "No one could predict the behavior of so many different stocks and commodities in so many markets with such precision. It's just impossible. And then there are the errors. There's something very strange about the errors. They're not random. My analysts could explain this better to you, but they seem to form a pattern. As though they were *deliberate*. As though he's just throwing in a few mistakes to make himself look occasionally fallible.

"And then, there's no method behind all this. No consistent method, anyway. Sometimes it seems to be technical, other times it's earnings and dividends, and other times again it just seems to come out of a clear blue sky."

"I'm sorry," I said. "Technical?"

"Technical analysts look at broad movements in the market, repetitive patterns. They use the past to predict the future. They don't care about inflation or interest rates or profits, just those patterns. The technical analyst won't tell you to buy or sell a particular share. He'll just tell you to buy or sell, period. Like Wilks. On the theory that a rising market raises all boats and a declining one sinks them all. Reeve has given a couple of general buy or sell signals. But he also makes recommendations about individual shares, and he waffles a little about price-earnings ratio, although his heart doesn't really seem to be in it. Which is very strange, because usually you're either a technical guy or a price-earnings guy. You're not likely to be both, and to be right on both fronts."

"I'll take your word for it," I said.

I looked at the letter in front of me. *"Expect an upswing in the Dow by mid February, led by oil and gas shares. Look for gains in Gulf, City Services, Texas International ... Expect silver to test its 1980 high by early spring ... Examination of transportation and mining indexes indicated no support for a broad-based advance ... Interest rates will remain in the 18 to 20% range ... High tech shares are heading for a fall ... Sincerely yours, Reeve."*

"How are high tech shares doing?" I asked.

"On the skids," Staefler said. "Off another five points this morning."

"Did he call it, or create it?"

"A thousand subscribers won't have that much impact," Staefler said. "Even though illegal duplication puts this in the hands of four or five thousand people, and even though most of those will be big investors. It's still pretty low-profile, compared to someone like Wilks. It's getting more influential all the time, but for the moment it's probably safe to say that he called it."

"Who is this guy?" I asked. "And how does he do it?"

"Nobody knows who he is. No one has even seen him. And no one had heard of him before he started this letter. All we know about him is his post

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

office box number. In Burlington, Vermont."

"It's a small town."

"We don't even know if he lives there. We don't know one single thing about him. As far as we can tell, the man has no organization, no outside advisors, no research staff. Zip. As for how he does it, that's for you to find out."

"Maybe he's a genius," I said. "The Albert Einstein of the market. Maybe he's discovered the philosopher's stone. Maybe he's psychic, and maybe he just has good inside information."

"Yes, but inside information on so many stocks? So many *accurate* tips? That goes beyond a few loose lips. There would have to be espionage on a massive scale."

"That would require a vast organization," I objected. "Practically a CIA."

"Maybe not," Staefler said. "Maybe one guy could do it. One guy and a computer. Tapping into commercial data traffic on the coaxial cables. Getting advance information on oil discoveries, stock splits, mergers, maybe even government fiscal policy."

"How easy would that be?"

"I would have said absolutely impossible. All sensitive data like these are encrypted these days, mostly using the DES — the Data Encryption Standard. That's a 56-bit key. — Seventy-two quadrillion possibilities. Breaking it should be impossible — unless you had the biggest and fastest computer in the world. Bigger and faster than any computer anyone has ever built before. And who could build a computer like that? The Russians? The Mob? Who has resources on that kind of scale? And why piddle around with a newsletter when you could take over the entire economy?"

"Maybe to set us up," I suggested. "Maybe the Russians are just setting us up to feed us some information that will destabilize the economy. In which case this would be a job for the government."

"Not yet," Staefler said. "We have nothing to go on. Only suspicions. Tha's why I want you to find Reeve. Find out how he does it. How he operates. Who's behind him. I'll take it from there."

Tracking down Reeve through his post office box was not especially difficult, only very tiresome. I flew into Burlington and rented a car. I made arrangements with a local investigative firm for surveillance. Then I checked into a hotel near the post office and waited, staying as close to the phone as possible.

I waited four days. I amused myself in the interim by watching a lot of soap operas and catching up on my back issues of the *Journal of Social and Personal Psychology*. Interesting things were happening in the cognitive-behavioral area, but I was no longer a part of them. Five years and four non-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tenure track appointments grinding out introductory psychology courses had been enough of the academic life for me. These days I was investigating other phenomena.

Finally the call came.

"It's a couple of kids," said my local operative. "Emptied the box and then crossed the street and went into the diner. They're in there right now."

"I'll be right there," I said.

My operative was sitting at a table near the door. I sat down opposite him. He waved his hand towards the window. They were kids all right, maybe eighteen or nineteen, casually dressed, one male and one female. There was a large mail bag at their feet underneath the table.

"I can recommend the clam roll," my operative said. He was middle-aged and comfortably plump. He didn't have the slightest idea what this assignment was about and probably didn't care.

"Locals?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Ten to one they're Canadians. You get to recognize them around here after awhile. There's a Rabbit with Montreal plates at the meter outside. Could be theirs. Of course, Montreal plates are a dime a dozen round here, even mid week."

The waitress came to take my order. I took my operative's advice, and didn't regret it.

I wrote a check for his services. It made only a small dent in Staefler's advance.

The kids finished up and strolled out and got into the Rabbit. I strolled after them and got into my rented Dodge which was parked across the street. I followed them out to the highway. It was an easy tracking job. They didn't have the slightest notion that anyone was following them.

I lost them at the Canadian border when an overzealous customs officer insisted on going through my luggage. I picked them up again ten miles down the road and stayed on their tail all the way into Montreal.

We reached journey's end at a small and rather unprepossessing detached brick house in what looked like a lower-middle-class suburb in the north end of the city. One kid stayed in the car, and the other carried the bag up to the porch and rang the bell. The door opened, but it was too dark to see who was inside. A few minutes later the door opened again and the kid came out, holding an empty bag in one hand and an envelope in the other. The kid got back in the car and the car drove away.

I watched the house for a few hours. Lights went on, lights went off. Nobody went in or came out.

I locked my car and strolled over to the main street to get a bit to eat. I noted that my suspect's street was called Gracey. Just for the hell of it, I looked in a phone book to see if there was a Reeve listed on Gracey. There wasn't.

I walked back to my car and got inside and sat there shivering for a cou-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ple of hours. Montreal in February was colder than Burlington, which was colder than New York. But I didn't want to run the motor. Stake-outs had never been among my favorite activities.

I wrote a brief report for Staefler giving the suspect's address and put it in an envelope. I realized that I didn't have any Canadian stamps. I didn't have any American stamps for that matter. I left the envelope on top of the dashboard.

It was getting very late, and very cold. My feet were numb, and I was trying to remember the symptoms of frostbite. All of the lights in the house were out now. So were most of the lights on the street.

I sighed to myself. It was very clear to me what I had to do. I didn't like the idea that much, but I couldn't think of a better one. I got out of my car and stamped my feet a little until the circulation started to come back. Then I walked around to the side of the house and found a convenient basement window. I didn't have to break the glass. The interior frame was so rotten the inside catch came away with just a little pressure from a screwdriver.

The basement was low and damp. At one end the furnace rumbled away. At the other end was a stairway to the main floor. I followed the stairs up into a hallway, closing the door quietly behind me.

Kitchen, living room, dining room, office. No giant computers, just a desk and a couple of filing cabinets and a typewriter and a microfilm viewer. Upstairs was one more floor, presumably bedrooms. I didn't check it out.

I played my flashlight over the papers on the desk. Next month's issue of the *Reeve One Thousand*. Gold was about to go through its 1981 ceiling. I wondered if I should leave right now and call my broker. Then I remembered that I didn't have a broker.

I opened the top drawer of one of the filing cabinets. Files. Names of subscribers, statements, payments due. A regular little businessman.

I wasn't quite sure what I was looking for, or whether I would know what it was when I found it. Bottom drawer, more files. Second cabinet, top drawer ... no files. Boxes. Little cardboard boxes. I opened one. A spool of film, presumably microfilm. I looked at the title on the box. I blinked. I looked at it again. I shook my head. I looked at it still a third time.

And then the lights went on and a man came through the door carrying a gun.

"Why not?" I asked. "Why wouldn't you call the police?"

He sighed.

"This is all very messy, you know," he said. "I expected to arouse interest eventually. I expected that someone would track me down. But I didn't expect anything quite so crude as this. I expected that I would be able to explain matters in a civilized manner."

"Go ahead," I said. "Explain away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm reasonably civilized."

He sighed again.

"I had it all worked out you know. What I was going to say. I was going to say that it was all a matter of computers."

I nodded my head. "Well that sounds reasonable," I said. "I can certainly buy that. Using computers to decode data traffic. We suspected something of the sort."

"Oh no," he said. He looked positively shocked. "That would be quite illegal, not to mention impossible. I was going to say that I was using computers to generate my predictions, using a highly sophisticated economic modelling software package of my own device.

"And if they didn't buy that," he continued. "I was simply going to claim that I was psychic. That I could read the future like an open book."

"I prefer the computers," I said. "You can do wonderful things with computers these days. But I suppose I could buy that too. In fact, you must be psychic. What other explanation could there be?"

"Mr. Hendricks," he said. "You are still holding the other explanation in your hand. As we both very well know."

I looked again at the impossible title on the microfilm box.

NEW YORK TIMES, March 6th -21st, 1985

"And that," he said, "is why I obviously cannot call the police."

"I see it," I said. "But I'm still not quite sure I believe it. Where did you get this?"

"From the library," he said. "You can take my word for it that no one will miss it."

"What library?" I asked. "Where?"

"I think you mean, *when*, don't you?" he asked. "The *where* of it doesn't make a great deal of difference, but I'll tell you anyway. From the UCLA library, *circa* January 1993."

"You're claiming that you traveled to the future?"

"It's the other way around, Mr. Hendricks. I traveled *from* the future — bringing with me a microfilm run of the *New York Times* 1981 to 1991. The paper ceased publication in 1991, but then you wouldn't know that."

"Ceased publication?" I echoed.

"No newsprint, no power supply, no staff. No New York city, for all intents and purposes. And no *New York Times*. Let me tell you about the future, Mr. Hendricks. You wouldn't like it."

"War?" I asked.

"Oh, certainly a few small wars here and there. But nothing really dramatic. Not in my time, at least. I've no idea what happened after I left. But basically just a ... *falling apart*. The same process that is going on all around us right now, but accelerated a hundredfold. A collapse of overstrained socio-economic structures. I could try to explain it to you, but it's really not my field. This financial stuff does

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not come easily to me, let me tell you. I'm a physicist, not an economist. Or I was. Now I just write my little letters."

"How did you get here?" I asked. "And why here?"

"Experimental process," he said. "Tachyons, and so forth. We had never tried it on a human being, but the animal tests were promising. And then they closed down the university, so I figured, what the hell? How could I be any worse off? As for why here, the process only extended back twelve years. But twelve good years is better than none."

"Why Montreal?"

"A number of reasons," he said. "Anonymity. No danger of encountering people who knew me, or my own self of this period. Keeping a distance from curious subscribers. And then, Canada will survive the collapse a little better than the USA, up to 1993 at least. Fewer people to begin with, a more centralized banking system, a smaller underclass, greater social discipline... Of course, there will be trouble here, too. Quebec will attempt to separate in 1986, if I remember correctly, and there will be some bloodshed. But by then I plan to be farther west, possibly in Edmonton."

"And the letters?" I asked. "What's the point of the letters?"

He shrugged. "Money," he said. "By the time things get really tough around here, I plan to be long gone. I plan to buy myself a nice little Greek island to retire on." He laughed. "Maybe I'll buy all of Greece."

"Why sell the information? Why not just play the market?"

"That's a good question," he said. "Initially I planned to do this just for a year. To get seed money for my own investments. But you know, there's something a little compulsive about it — being all-knowing — that could be a hard thing to give up. And apparently I don't want to give it up. Not for a while at least. Two years from now there will be an international currency collapse. It will be the first critical moment in the forthcoming sequence of disasters. It will be triggered by a run on the yen in the New York markets, and it will be followed by what, for want of a better word, people will call a Depression. According to news reports of the time, massive selling of the yen will be blamed upon a mysterious market letter, the *Reeve One Thousand.*"

"Then it will be your fault," I said. "You're going to make it happen."

"That's not true," he said. "It's inevitable. It's all quite inevitable. I may be the instrument of fate, but I'm simply following script."

"And what does the script say about me?"

"Nothing," he said. "Of course, I don't have copies of the Montreal *Gazette*. If I did, it might carry the sad story of the New York investigator found murdered in the trunk of his car. But I don't recall any mention of your name in the *Times*. Of course, the sto-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ry wouldn't have mentioned me, so I might have passed right over it. I'm not that interested in crime news."

"You don't have to kill me," I said. "You know that you keep on publishing the letter. I don't stop you."

He considered.

"What you say may be true. But I think it's more realistic to assume that I *do* kill you, because that seems by far the simplest way of ensuring your silence. And therefore, I *must* kill you. I hope you understand that?"

What if we break the script?" I asked. "What if you don't kill me and you stop publishing your letter and the yen doesn't collapse and there isn't another Depression?"

"You think I haven't thought about that?" he asked. "You think I *want* things to fall apart? I'm just trying to survive the best way I can. And I just feel that things *had* to happen this way. I've tried to stop, you know. I've really tried. There are days when I've said, I'm not going to work on that letter. I've even left the house, gone downtown. And then it was as if this giant hand just grabbed hold of me and *forced* me to come back here and sit down and write the goddam letter."

"You feel compelled," I said. "All right. But don't you see that it's just a delusion? You've been under tremendous stress. You've escaped from a terrible situation. You find yourself holding unbelievable knowledge and power. You're alone, isolated, cut off. Nobody could blame you for going just a little crazy, for trying to give up all responsibility for your actions. But that doesn't make it any the less a delusion."

The gun seemed to waver in his hand.

"You can stop, Reeve," I said. "If that's your name. You can step right off this crazy conveyor belt that's going to deliver you right back where you started from."

"Paradox," he said. "It would be a paradox. Like killing my own grandfather. I have to follow the script. The economy has to collapse."

"Maybe it will collapse without you," I said. "Who the hell knows? It'll work out one way or another. But you don't have to have any part of it."

"I have to publish the letter," he said. "I have to invest. I have to have money to escape the collapse. I can't just sit around and wait for it to happen. I have to be prepared. Prepared."

"You don't," I said. "You don't have to do any of those things."

"No," he said. He shook his head vigorously. "No. Advances in strategic metals. Disasterous coffee crop. Changes in world microclimate. Pollution of fisheries. Opportunities in orange juice futures. Middle eastern war. Assassination ... No."

He was decompensating before my eyes, and I wasn't sure that it was going to be any improvement. It wasn't a great moment to make my move, but I was unlikely to have a better one.

I threw the microfiche box into his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

face, and dived at his legs as he raised a hand to ward it off. it was not a great tackle, but it was enough to bring him down. We struggled. I tried to pin the arm with the gun to the floor and he tried to point it up at me. The gun went off and blew a hole out of the plaster in the ceiling. I got a better grip on his hand, forcing the gun downward. The gun went off again and blew a hole in his chest.

I thought about calling the police. I did not think about it for very long. There was a reasonable chance that I would get out of any criminal charges, except perhaps breaking-and-entering. There was a fainter chance that I could keep my license when I got back home. But that was all almost beside the point. There was dynamite in Reeve's filing cabinets, and I had to get rid of it before it blew up the world.

There was a working fireplace in the living room. I started to carry the microfilm boxes in and pile them on to the grate. It took me half an hour to transfer them all. The last one to go was the reel in the microfilm viewer. It was set up with next month's news.

I realized that the police had not arrived of their own accord. Obviously no one had heard the shots, or no one had thought enough of them to report them.

I realized also that I had failed to start the fire. I could have already destroyed most of the stuff. I had taken a real risk of being interrupted before I got around to starting the blaze. I cursed softly, and knelt to light a match.

The matches wouldn't light. I pawed my pockets for more. I had none.

I went into the kitchen. No matches. I turned on the electric burner on the stove and lit a rolled up piece of newspaper. I carried my torch into the living room and knelt again in front of the fireplace. And froze.

When the paper began to burn my fingers I dropped it on the tiles and stamped it out.

I picked the top spool off the pile and walked back into the office. Reeve was still lying on the floor. I ignored him: there would be time to dispose of him later — plenty of time before I left for Edmonton. Or rather, I told myself, New York.

I put the spool in the viewer and turned the machine on. I scanned forward to the first business page and began to take notes.

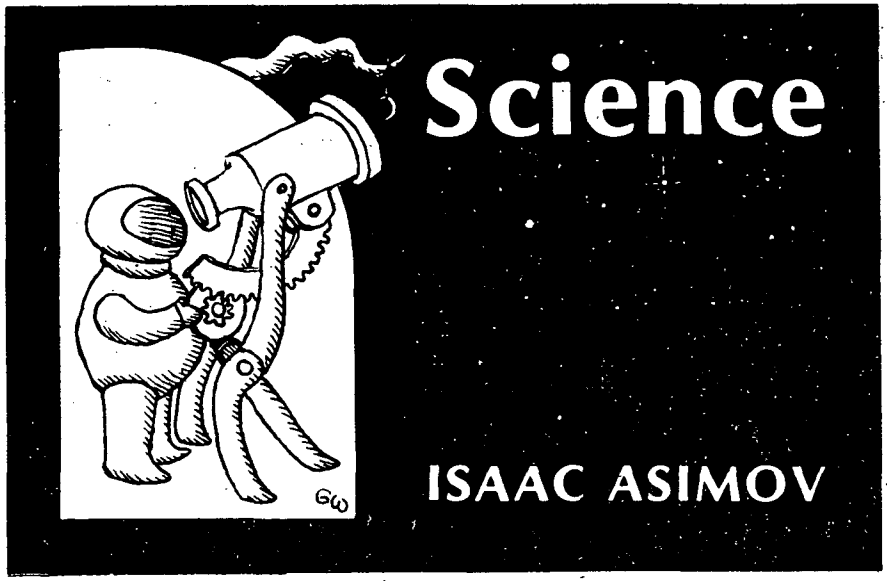
Dawn was breaking when I sat down at the desk and began to write.

"Interesting opportunities are developing in the long term bond market," I wrote. "Expect the Federal Reserve to loosen controls on the money supply, sparking an upward movement in...."

And later, *"Sincerely Yours, Reeve."*

Snow flurries were developing outside my window. It would be a lot warmer in Greece.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Drawing by Gahan Wilson

A DIFFERENCE OF AN "E"

When someone writes as much as I do, he must live in constant dread of possibly seeming, now and then, to have borrowed the work of others in an unauthorized manner. I say "seeming" because there is, of course, no danger in my case of *actually* doing so. Seeming, however, is bad enough.

For instance, some years ago, an encyclopedia asked me to go over their short article on science fiction in order to correct and update it. I read it and it seemed perfectly correct, so I made no changes. I did add two sentences as updating, collected my small fee, and forgot the whole thing.

What I did not know was that the encyclopedia then removed the name of the original author and placed my own name on the article instead. About a month ago, I received a hot letter from a reader who was convinced he had uncovered some skullduggery. He sent me photocopies of the earlier article over the original author's name, and of the later articles over my name, and demanded an explanation.

Patiently, I explained and said I had not known of the auctorial substitution. (After all, my record of authorship is not so small that I have to appropriate a small encyclopedia item.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—It didn't help. Still breathing flame, my investigating correspondent is writing to the encyclopedia for *their* version of the story.

Here's an example with more substance to it. About twenty years ago, at an MIT picnic, I heard a humorous retort to the well-known, sloppy-sentimental song that goes: "Tell me why the stars do shine / Tell me why does the ivy twine / Tell me why the skies are blue / And I will tell you why I love you."

The MIT version of the second verse was:

Nuclear fusion makes stars to shine.
Tropisms make the ivy twine.
Rayleigh scattering makes skies so blue.
Glandular hormones is why I love you.

I liked the verse and, given my memory, remembered it and sang it, year in and year out. Finally, I included it (slightly modified) in my book *Isaac Asimov's Treasury of Humor*. I laid no claim to it, you understand, but neither did I give credit to anyone, for I did not know who had written it.

A couple of months ago, I received a letter from Richard C. Levine, now living in Texas, who picked up the *Treasury* and found his own quatrain staring at him. I gladly give credit.

It works the other way around, too. Last week a physicist told me that the most exciting cosmogonic theory now being worked on was the creation of the Universe from *nothing* and told me the basic reasoning behind it. I asked when that had first been suggested. Back about 1972 or 1973 by so-and-so, said he.

With great satisfaction, I referred him to my article "I'm Looking Over A Four-Leaf Clover" (F & SF, September 1966) which advanced a similar theory based on similar reasoning, and later sent him a copy.

Of course, I assumed nothing out of the way. I am sure that the physicist of 1972 arrived at his conclusions independently; in far greater detail, and with far greater precision of argument than I was capable of doing — but I was delighted to be able to claim a certain amount of priority, that's all.

I was also pleased that something that I had presented as nothing more than a delightful bit of speculation was coming to be of serious concern to physicists. That is not an unusual thing in the history of science, actually — which brings me to Frederick Stanley Kipping, an English chemist born in 1863.

Kipping was interested in asymmetric molecules, something I discussed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in some detail in "The 3-D Molecule" (F & SF, January 1972). To repeat the point briefly here, if a carbon atom is attached to four different atoms or atom groupings, the resulting molecule can be arranged in one of two different ways, one the mirror-image of the other. Such molecules are asymmetric.

The nature and reason for the asymmetry was explained in 1874, and there was no reason why the explanation should apply to the carbon atom only. Kipping, together with his assistant, William Jackson Pope, labored to synthesize asymmetric molecules involving such atoms as nitrogen and tin.

In 1899, Kipping began a long series of researches on silicon compounds, supposing, quite rightly, that the silicon atom, which is so similar chemically to the carbon atom, should produce asymmetric molecules under the same conditions that the carbon atom did.

This brings us back to the subject matter of the preceding two essays.

The silicon compounds occurring in nature are the silicates which, as I explained last month, have silicon atoms connected to oxygen atoms by each of their four bonds. Under these conditions, asymmetry is not to be expected at the molecular level. What Kipping wanted to do was to connect silicon atoms to different groupings at different bonds.

As it happened, a French chemist, Francois Auguste Grignard, had, in 1900, worked out a way of attaching atom groups to other atoms by means of the use of magnesium metal in dry ether.

Making use of such "Grignard reactions," Kipping began to add atom groupings to silicon atoms in unprecedented ways, and tried to synthesize molecules in which silicon atoms replaced key carbon atoms in simple and well known carbon compounds.

Consider carbon dioxide, for instance, O=C=O. Leave one oxygen in place, but remove the other and substitute for it two different carbon-containing atom groups, one for each of the carbon bonds. Symbolize the two carbon-containing groups as R_1 and R_2. You have a molecule that looks like this: $\begin{matrix} R_1 \\ R_2 \end{matrix}\!\!>\!C=O$. Chemists call this a "ketone," and the names given to such compounds usually have an "−one" suffix to indicate that.

Kipping tried to synthesize the silicon analog of a ketone, $\begin{matrix} R_1 \\ R_2 \end{matrix}\!\!>\!Si=O$, and, using the usual suffix, referred to such an analog as a "silicone."

Personally, I don't like the name and wish he hadn't thought of it. "Silicone" and "silicon" are distinguished by a difference of an "e," and that isn't enough. It's too easy to produce confusion by means of a typographical error.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What's more, Kipping never managed to produce a silicon ketone. Yet the name silicone came to be applied not only to that molecule, but to all compounds in which silicon atoms are attached to carbon-containing atom groups.

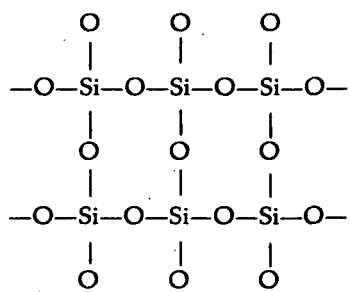
Kipping worked on the problem of asymmetric silicon molecules for forty years and published fifty-one papers. He achieved his aims, and was able to show, quite thoroughly, that silicon compounds followed the same rule of asymmetry that carbon compounds did.

The silicones he formed in demonstrating this did not seem good for anything else, however. They were curiosities that served only to make a theoretical point. As late as 1937, Kipping, then 74, said, sadly, "The prospect of any immediate and important advance in the section of organic chemistry does not seem to be very hopeful."

He was wrong! In 1941, the first silicone patents were issued, and a silicone industry began to grow and expand very rapidly. Kipping lived to be 85 and had the pleasure of witnessing this unexpected success. His ivory-tower research had become a matter of practical value after all.

Let's see why.

The silicon dioxide lattice, as I showed you last month, looks something like this (if you remember that it is actually three-dimensional and not two):



These attachments can go on indefinitely so that silicon dioxide (as well as silicates, which have metal atoms added to the lattice here and there) are high melting solids.

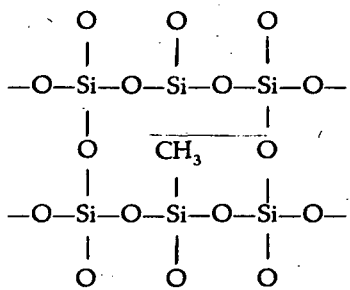
Suppose, though, that in place of the oxygen atoms that serve as the connecting bridges between the silicon-oxygen chains, you have some atom, or group of atoms, that has but one bond. It can attach itself to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

silicon atom of a particular chain with its one bond and will then have nothing left over to attach to a neighboring chain.

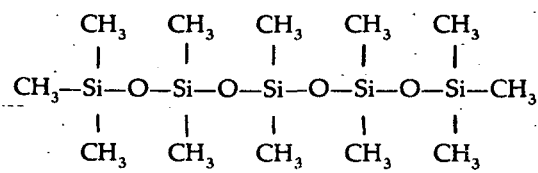
Let's consider carbon-containing atom groups in this connection. Carbon atoms (like silicon atoms) possess four bonds, but three of them can be firmly attached to hydrogen atoms, leaving the fourth bond free for attachment elsewhere. We might represent the group thus, $-CH_3$. It is called a "methyl group." (I have the urge to explain here why it should be called "methyl," but I will suppress it for now and succumb to the temptation some other time in another essay.)

If you imagine a methyl group replacing an oxygen atom in the silicate lattice, it would break a bridge between two silicons atoms:



The more methyl groups one adds to the lattice, the more bridges are broken and the weaker the lattice grows. Eventually, the lattice falls apart into separate fragments, which may be straight chains of silicon-oxygen combinations, branched chains, or rings.

A typical "methyl silicone" would be the following:



Such methyl silicones are oily, very much as true oils would be (such true oils being composed of chains of carbon atoms, for the most part). The silicon-oxygen chain is more stable than a carbon chain is, however. It is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more resistant to change through rising temperature or chemical interaction.

Oiliness arises out of a tendency for long-chain molecules to slide past each other only sluggishly. The more sluggishly they do so, the more viscous the oil is; the more slowly it pours, for instance.

A liquid that is at once oily and viscous is useful as a lubricant. The oilness allows two metal surfaces, which are moving with respect to each other, to do so over a film of molecules moving past each other, rather than in direct contact. This means the motion is relatively silent and frictionless and inflicts no damage to the metal surfaces. If the liquid is also sufficiently viscous, it does not flow out from between the metal surfaces, but remains there, continuing its good work in preventing damage.

Without lubrication, it would be useless to expect any machines that involve moving parts to work for long.

Ordinary lubricating oils tend to grow less viscous with heat. Rising temperatures accelerate the motion of molecules, encourage the long carbon chains to slide past each other more easily, and increase the danger of the oil leaking away from between the metal surfaces.

In addition, rising temperatures accelerate the speed with which ordinary lubricating oils combine with the oxygen of the air (or with other vapors that may be present in the atmosphere). Such chemical combinations may produce corrosive compounds that will rust the metals, or sludges that reduce the oiliness of the compound, or breaks in the carbon-chain that reduce the viscosity. In no case does such chemical combination improve the properties of the lubricating oil.

The sluggish motion of the silicone chains past each other is, on the other hand, scarcely affected by temperature. This means that the viscosity of silicones is relatively constant, declining only slightly as temperature rises.

What is more, silicones are far less likely to combine with various chemicals than ordinary lubricating oils are, and are therefore far less likely to develop any of the undesirable attributes that ordinary lubricating oils would at comparable temperatures.

Silicone lubricating oils maintain their useful properties without trouble at temperatures as high as 150° C, and if oxygen is excluded, at temperatures well over 200° C.

There are also times when it is necessary to lubricate surfaces that are moving past each other at very low temperatures. An ordinary lubricating oil that is at proper viscosity at ordinary temperatures rapidly increases its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

viscosity as the temperature drops, sets hard, and becomes useless. A silicone lubricating oil does not.

To put figures to it, an ordinary lubricating oil may be 1,800 times as viscous at −35° C as at 40° C (a spread of 75 degrees) while a silicone lubricating oil will be only 7 times as viscous at −35° C as at 40° C.

During the crisis days of World War II, the usefulness of silicones in the highly necessary field of lubrication came to be realized, and that led directly to the zooming importance of the compounds.

Silicone viscosity tends to increase in a predictable way as the length of the silicon-oxygen chain increases, so that silicone lubricating oils can be easily prepared to suit any viscosity characteristics needed in a particular job.

If the chain is made long enough, the viscosity becomes high enough to produce solid substances with a rubbery quality. This is particularly so if the chains are connected to each other by a few bridges.

If more connecting bridges are built into the silicon, the result is a resinous substance.

All silicones are electrically non-conducting, so that the silicone rubbers and silicone resins can be used as electrical insulators. They are better than ordinary rubbers and resins in that they are more resistant to heat, and are less likely to become brittle, crack, or otherwise develop flaws in their insulating capacity.

If a silicone is produced with just the proper viscosity, it can even be used as a sort of toy. A silicone may be sufficiently viscous to flow very, very slowly, and resist being hurried. The long molecules will continue to slide past each other with dignity, so to speak, and pressure will be of no use.

A ball of such a substance, thrown against a wall, for instance, will deform under the pressure of contact, but will spring back, as though in hot resentment at having been forced to move at more than its stately will. In other words, it will bounce efficiently.

Put it down on a table top, however, and given enough time, it will flatten out, accommodating itself to any unevenness of the surface. Knead it between your fingers and it will be as moldable as wax. It was placed on the market as Silly Putty, and I well remember being affected by the craze for it several decades ago.

Silicones, like ordinary carbon-chain molecules, do not dissolve in water. Nor do they mix with water in any way and become waterlogged.

This comes in handy when silicones are added, as a film to the surface of textiles or other materials.

Thus, you can begin with methylchlorsilance (made up of molecules

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which consist of a silicon atom attached to three methyl groups and a chlorine atom.) This will combine with cellulose, which makes up the bulk of any textile. The cellulose contains oxygen-hydrogen groupings, and the hydrogen atom of such a grouping combines with the chlorine atoms of the methylchlorsilane. This means that a silicon atom, with three methyl groups attached, is hooked on to an oxygen atom of the cellulose and stays there reasonably permanently.

The entire textile surface is thus coated with a layer of silicone that is one molecule thick. The layer can't be seen or felt but the textile, so layered, will repel water.

Nor is it the methyl group only that can be attached to silicon-oxygen chains. Other carbon-containing groups can be attached to the silicon atoms of such chains. The "ethyl group," for instance, which is made up of two carbon atoms and five hydrogen atoms, can be so used.

We might imagine all kinds of carbon-containing groups attached to the silicon-oxygen chain, a whole series of different kinds, all complicated and each attached to the chain in a different place.

Such very complicated silicone molecules (which we can easily erect in imagination) would be the equivalent of proteins and nucleic acids, though not necessarily mimicking them in structure. We don't have such complicated silicones and, as far as I know, no one is trying to manufacture them, but it seems entirely fair to agree that they could exist in theory. And if so, they may be the basis of a kind of silicon life; or, more properly, silicone life.

But if silicone life were possible, why did it not develop on Earth along with carbon life? Even if carbon life were more efficient in the long run and could win out in a competition, might we not expect silicone life to persist in small amounts, or in out-of-the-way environments where, for some reason, it might prove better fitted than carbon life is?

As far as we know, however, no trace of silicone life exists anywhere on Earth. Nor has it ever existed.

This may be because Earth is too cool for silicone life. If we compare silicone molecules with similar carbon-chain molecules, the one outstanding difference is the greater stability of the silicones, their greater resistance to heat and to chemical change.

That is great if that is what we want, but if we are dealing with life, that is *not* what we want. For life, we don't want stability, but ease of chemical change, the constant flow and counter-flow of electrons and atoms.

If life means change, then at every level silicone molecules would seem to be less alive, potentially, then carbon-chain molecules are.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It may also be that Earth is too watery for silicone life. All the changes that characterize life take place quickly, and with delicate precision, because the molecules of life are immersed in a watery medium with which they readily interact, and in which some of them dissolve.

Carbon life is impossible, as far as we know, except in the presence of water (or of some liquid with water-like properties, which includes the possession of polar molecules, that is, molecules in which at least some bits of positive and negative electrical charge are separated asymmetrically).

Silicones, however, have a tendency not to interact with water or with any polar liquid, but to interact with non-polar liquids instead. Even if carbon-containing atom groups of types that interact with water are added to the silicone chain, the result will be a molecule that is less interactive with water than a corresponding carbon-chain molecule would be.

If life implies interaction with water, or a polar liquid in general, then at every level silicone molecules would seem to be less alive, potentially, than carbon-chain molecules are.

But what if we imagine a world that is not cool and watery as Earth is? Suppose we imagine a world with a temperature well above the boiling point of water. In that case, the temperature may be high enough to make silicone molecules sufficiently active to serve as a foundation for life, and there would be no water to support a competing carbon life (in which the heat would destroy the too active carbon compounds in any case).

To be sure, there would have to be *some* liquid in which the silicone molecules could dissolve or with which it could readily interact, and it may be that the silicones would supply that as well.

Relatively simple silicones might be non polar liquids at elevated temperatures of, say, 350° C, and in them might be dissolved, or otherwise dispersed, the complicated molecules that would be the silicone equivalents of proteins and nucleic acids. We might then have silicone life.

We might further imagine the complex silicones being built up at the expense of solar energy out of silica plus simple carbon compounds, this being the province of the equivalent of silicone plants. Once formed, the complex silicones might, after being eaten by the equivalent of silicone animals, have their carbon-containing portions oxidized away to yield chemical energy, leaving over solid silica as a waste product. (Stanley G. Weinbaum pictured a situation something like this in "A Martian Odyssey" back in 1934.)

We can raise an objection, however. We picture the complicated silicones as possessing very complex carbon-containing side chains. The more complex these are, the more sensitive they will be to high

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

temperatures, surely. The silicon-oxygen chain is a stabilizing influence, but even it must have its limits.

Eventually, the carbon-containing side chains would be unable to survive the high temperatures, and this, I suspect, will be at some point well short of where we can expect life to exist.

But consider this. The intricate carbon chains and carbon rings of living tissue have most of their bonds taken up by hydrogen atoms so that the compounds of life are, in a way, modified "hydrocarbons." This is possible because hydrogen atoms are extremely small and they can take up most or all of the carbon bonds without getting in each other's way. Only one other atom is small enough to do this, and that is the fluorine atom. What if we imagine complicated carbon compounds that were modified "fluorocarbons"?

As it happens, the carbon-fluorine bond is stronger than the carbon-hydrogen bond. Fluorocarbons are therefore more stable and more inert than the corresponding hydrocarbons are, and are more capable of withstanding high temperatures.

We might imagine "fluorosilicones," which are more stable and inert than ordinary silicones, and which could survive the heat required to make them undergo the changes we associate with life.

(This is not a brand-new idea with me. I mentioned it in passing in "Not As We Know It," which appeared in the September 1961, F & SF.)

Next comes another objection. Silicones and fluorosilicones are built of silicon atoms, oxygen atoms, carbon atoms, hydrogen atoms, and fluorine atoms. On the hot planets on which silicones or fluorosilicones might form the bases of life, carbon atoms, hydrogen atoms, and fluorine atoms are quite likely to be very rare, if not virtually non-existent. These molecules tend to exist as compounds that are easily melted and vaporized, and hot worlds, if rather small (as they would be expected to be) would not be able to hold them with their feeble gravitational fields.

The Moon, which reaches fairly high temperatures during its two week day, is very poor in these volatile atoms, and we can be certain this is true of the still hotter Mercury as well.

Venus is massive enough to retain a thick atmosphere that contains ample carbon atoms in its carbon dioxide molecules, and a lesser supply of hydrogen atoms in its water molecules. It is conceivable that fluorine atoms might be present, too.

And yet are conditions on Venus such that silicones can be naturally produced, even given the existence of raw materials? It seems to me almost

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

certainly not. I suspect that it would be extremely difficult to design a planet with the kind of chemistry that would allow silicones or fluorosilicones to be formed spontaneously and to have a chance of evolving into the complexity necessary for life.

Yet even though I have taken up three essays to demonstrate that silicon atoms do not serve as a basis for life, as carbon does — the fact is that a form of silicon life is actually in the process of development here on Earth.

Such life, however, is like nothing I have discussed so far, and so next month we will approach the whole matter from a completely new point of view.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS ON THE MOVE

If you are planning a change of address please notify us as far in advance as possible, and allow six weeks for the change to become effective.

Be sure to give us both your old and new address, including the zip codes. Print clearly and, if possible, attach an old mailing label.

OLD ADDRESS
(attach label here if available)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____
(please print)

NEW ADDRESS

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE,
Mercury Press, Inc., PO Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joanna Russ's new story extrapolates the current trend toward an increasingly aged population into a future where 20 million senior citizens are housed in one small retirement community. You want to know how? Read on.

Elf Hill

BY

JOANNA RUSS

Thank you, I'm *quite* all right now, really. It wasn't anything only....

Well, that book with the pictures.

Fairy tales? Oh, yes! I'm sure they're harmless; I certainly didn't mean there was anything wrong with them. They're quite pretty, even the ones — what is it called, "Elf Hill"? All those people who are hollow behind, you know, like a mask. I don't suppose they'd strike most people as horrible, but....

It's just that they remind me of something.

May I? Oh, thank you! I haven't seen a real window — except one — in ever so long; and yes, that's the bridge over there — it's quite clear today, only a faint sort of fog and all that marvelous yellow-brown color — and one can see the tops of the buildings as nicely as on television.

Would you? It's nothing; only I've just been to see my mother at Sunset Estates. I don't want to be a bore; everyone knows the feelings you have about your mother can be—

The pictures?

Well, that's just it. It isn't my feelings; it's something else. At least I think it is. It's about the place, you see, and I don't know enough to decide what to do, and yet I have to do something. I mean — that's why I came here. I suppose you have the fairy-tale books for when you see children, don't you, although I do think they'd be frightened at pictures like that. But then maybe I'm the only one to be frightened. Which is why I'm here, you see.

I've just visited Mother at Sunset Estates. Oh, I told you. Well, there's only me now, ever since Michael got that wonderful job — but *so* far away, out past the Rings, you know! — and Father has been dead for ever so long.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Before retirement, too, although back then retirement wasn't so important because people weren't so old — so many people didn't get so old, I mean. You know the statistics; I'm not expressing it well, but you know what I mean. Anyway, I'm the only child and the only daughter, too, and I used to spend all my weekends with her when she was at home. I liked to do it. It wasn't hard for me, as it is for some people; we've always gotten along. But then Mother moved to Sunset Estates and you can't visit there more than once; it's simply too expensive. After that you have to be content with video calls and not even live ones, either, because the reception is so bad. They don't tell you why but it is. Mother said she knew why but couldn't say on a tape, so of course I had to go and see her in person.

Well, I couldn't leave my job during the week because they take that out of your pension — which is such a struggle nowadays! — so I took the BosWash loop Friday evening and stood on line to cross the Atlantic and then again to get the Shuttle over the Arctic. I can't say that I wasn't annoyed at her for being so far away — they say it's normal to have bad feelings about your parents as well as good ones, so I suppose I shouldn't complain — but Mother's awfully lucky to have gotten into Sunset Estates at all. She might've had nothing but a bunk in Happihomes or some awful place like that if she hadn't put all her saving into her retirement — and I help just as much as I can, and Michael sends us both a great deal. He says "Thank time dilation and Einstein for the favorable rate of exchange." I'm not sure what that means, but it *is* some sort of miracle; that I know. Anyway, I didn't get into the terminal until the next morning and even then there was a delay and an awful scare — about scrambling people as they went through the transformer — so it all took much longer than I expected. Then there's the difference in the time zones. I never quite understood how that works, but I know it's on account of mother's being so far away. It was very early there and I tried to rent a chair in a transient hotel but the automatic entrance had set the rates too high, even at that hour. Then I tried to phone Sunset Estates, but the local reception wasn't just as bad (as Mother had warned me it would be); it was terrible. So in the end I had to take a subway without calling ahead. I didn't know if she had stayed up to see me or even if she thought I was lost — capsules get fed into the wrong branch lines all the time, you know — or even if she thought I might be dead in a transformer accident. But when I got out of my capsule before the elevator bank and managed to find the one with the right number — and *then* made sure I punched the right location — but why do you think they say "punched" all the time? — really, it's more like tapping with your fingers — anyway, they do, especially on television — so I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

got to the anteroom of Sunset Estates and there she was.

Oh no, she was fine. There wasn't anything wrong. At least I didn't think so then. The anteroom was awfully small and dirty, but most of them are; it's just that I thought Sunset Estates, being so expensive, would have a better one. Only it didn't. And the corridor beyond was perfectly awful too — chipped plastic panels covered with grime, as if nobody ever washed them — and in one place two old women and an old man sitting on the floor in the strangest sort of way — one old lady was actually *poking* the old man! — and he was pulling at the old lady's hair, only not hard, of course, since all of them were quite old, but in an odd sort of stupid way, like an old baby.

I said, "Good heavens! Who's that?" and they stopped and stared at me in the oddest fashion, as if they were going to cry. Mother said, "It's only the Hallers; don't mind them." Then one of the old people tried to get up, but they looked awfully thin and feeble, you know, and really very sick and I said, "Shouldn't we tell someone?" but Mother jerked me by the sleeve to make me go faster and said, "If they want help, they shouldn't be out in the hall." This wasn't like her, for she used to be very kind, but she looked as if the Hallers — if that was their name — were too disgusting to bother about. Then I thought they mightn't belong to Sunset Estates at all, since if they did they would surely choose to visit each other's apartments instead of sitting in a dreadful, dirty, bare corridor four feet across — which is all it was, really. Certainly that seemed to explain it.

I supposed we hadn't come to the apartments yet, since the doors were so close together — just like closet doors, actually — but Mother said we had. They were "Branch doors," she said. So she turned a combination in one and there was another door and then another and then another, each just a few steps from the last and each with another panel of buttons. And there were other old people by each of them, looking terribly ill, so much so that I was concerned. But finally it was the last door and we were in Mother's apartment.

It was *lovely*!

I don't think I've seen anything so wonderful since I was a little girl, back when there was room for everybody. I'm so used to living with everything folded up into everything that the sheer space of it made me dizzy. At any rate something did as I went through the doorway; why, Mother had to hold my arm for the first few minutes, I was so stunned.

We had come in on a sort of balcony a few steps above a living room that must've been thirty feet either way, and all of it carpeted in pale blue just as thick as thick, and creamy-white walls with fruit and flowers modeled in them near the ceiling — like plastic, you know, only heavier

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and thicker somehow — and chairs and couches in pale stuff that shone and shone, not like plastic, either — and pictures on the walls with real paint on them (I don't think they were the sort of pictures Mother liked, though she said she'd gotten to like them) and little tables like the "wood look" only different, so wonderfully different, like everything else! And there were flowers woven into the carpet in all sorts of rich, pale colors, and here and there doors leading to other rooms as wonderful as that one — only think, *ten rooms* — with a television set and a modern kitchen five times as big as mine, and here and there flowers in vases on the tables, and such bright colors that I thought they couldn't be real!

But they were. They really were: roses and lilies and gladiolus and I don't know what. There was a television room, too, and a sewing room and closets everywhere just full of clothes — oh, I can't tell you! So soft, so bright, so — so very shining and *good*. And then Mother took me through all of it for the biggest surprise of all. This was at the back. I had thought Sunset Estates, being so far up, might have a common room or dining room where the old people could look outside, but Mother said no. There was no common dining room; you cooked in your own kitchen or you dialed meals to be sent to you, just as you could dial clothes from the catalog. (We could do that, she said, and eat in the dining-room — imagine, a room just for eating!) I was saying how sad it was not to be able to look out, if only a little, when Mother touched something on the wall of a small room with curtains about it on three sides and a sort of lounge chair and table in the middle. I thought it was a sun-room, and when the curtains moved back there would be silvered plastic plates with lamps behind them, the way they have in the sun-bathing clubs.

It was nothing like that at all.

The walls were glass and outside there was sunlight and a breeze, and huge, creamy, piled-up clouds on the horizon — which was oh, so far away, miles and miles! — and nearby what must have been at least a whole square mile of lawn with flowering tropical shrubs on it and palm trees, just like the ones you see on television, and in one place a lake with birds swimming in it. Everything was rich and winding and lovely. I can't do it justice, I really can't.

I think I began to cry then; I was so happy for her and so relieved she hadn't gone to Happihomes or Endfun Acres, which she would have had to do without that little extra bit from my salary. In fact, it was all too much for me and I wouldn't let her open the sliding glass doors, though I made her promise we would go out later.

The first thing I said in the kitchen (which was wonderful and had all sorts of machinery for cooking, most of it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

automatic) was "But how? How do they do it?" For surely everyone at Sunset Estates couldn't have such a marvelous apartment, let alone that huge park out there, all to themselves.

Mother was choosing food for us, watching the steel arm of the freezer choose a piece of corn-on-the-cob and move it into the microwave oven. She didn't even look at me. I said, "But Mother, how?"

She said, "What would you like to eat, dear?" in the same voice she had used when I was little and was doing something I shouldn't — a sort of bright voice but not really — so I knew she didn't want to tell me.

Instead she showed me all the machinery in the kitchen, which would do everything without her lifting a finger except to press a button, and then the hot-house room (only she called it a conservatory) and then all the glass and silver and crystal, and bone china in the dining room, and then length upon length of fabric if she wanted to sew or embroider. Then we were back in the kitchen and this time I wouldn't take no for an answer. I said, "I want to know *how*."

Mother said, her head tilted to one side, "Why dear, we share. Isn't that the secret of everything?"

I said, "But how can you share this? It isn't possible!" and she looked kind but impersonal, the way she used to do when she was explaining to Michael and me why we had to be good in school or how people didn't feel anything after they died or what an atom was. Mother used to be a teacher, you know. This time she said, "It is all, Mary Ellen" (that's my name) "on account of Space and Time," and then she told me how Sunset Estates could have twenty million retirees in its home and yet each one of them could have an apartment just as lovely as hers. And how each one of them — except for the Hallers, who didn't like such things — could even have a park, like the one I had seen, all to himself or herself.

"Imagine, Mary Ellen," (she said) "that this apartment is like a cube, a solid matter like a piece of wood or a lump of clay. Now if twenty million people all want that one piece of wood or lump of clay, there's no way you can give it to each of them, is there? You can shave the piece of wood very thin and give each one a thin sheet, but anyone can tell the difference between a solid cube of wood and a little piece of veneer, can't they?"

I said, "Mother, why—" but she put up her hand for silence, the way she used to do in the classroom.

"You can't give everyone the same solid piece of wood," she said, "if you divide it this way" (she moved her hand up and down) "or this" (she moved her hand from side to side) "or even this way" (and she moved it forward and back) "so what can you do with those twenty million people, who all want the same cube of wood? Well, you might divide it up along the di-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mension of time, mightn't you? That way you can have it for a second, and I can have it for a second, and somebody else for a second — which means sixty people in a minute and three hundred and sixty in an hour and so on."

I burst out, "But we already do that!" for it was only taking shifts, you see, which everybody does at work or at the museums or the movies, things like that. Mother knew what I was going to say, I think, because she smiled the way she had in the old days in the classroom and raised her hand again.

"Right, Mary Ellen!" she said. "What good is a wonderful apartment like this if you can only have it for a second every hour or every day? That's no good at all. It might work if the people could be made to live only that second in the day and the next one in the next day — and one could do that, you know, dear, or at least have them live one day out of the year — one could give them drugs or put them into electrical stasis or freeze them or something along that line. But then we old people would live a very, very long time, wouldn't we? — and there would be more and more old people retiring every year and all of them living practically forever — three hundred and sixty-five times slower than normal — which wouldn't help matters any.

"No, Sunset Estates does nothing like that. It couldn't possibly. All the same there are twenty million people and only one apartment and yet everybody has his or her own apartment all to himself or herself."

Mother paused for a moment. I didn't say anything, for I was just as much under her spell as when I had been a child and she ran around Michael to show how the earth and sun moved in relation to each other and how you could see it as either one moving — though I didn't understand that then and don't now, to tell the truth.

"Mary Ellen," said Mother then, her voice sinking in the old, thrilling way, "Time and Space are not separate things, they are really one and the same. I know that's difficult to understand and you always had trouble with it at school, but it's quite true. Here at Sunset Estates it isn't merely Time that's shaved into slices (so to speak) or even the wood cube itself — when I say the wooden cube I'm really talking about this lovely apartment and grounds, of course — but the two together that are divided up. Each minute here lasts exactly one minute. Each piece of my lovely furniture and beautiful crystal and marvelous clothing is as real and solid as it can be. Yet I share all of them with twenty million other people. At Sunset Estates it isn't just Space and Time that are shaved thin, but the combination: Spacetime. And Spacetime is Reality itself. It is Reality itself that is shaved into twenty million slices at Sunset Estates."

I said, "But, Mother, how can we exist here, then? How can real people fit into something so ... so thin?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She said, "The people too are shaved thin at Sunset Estates."

I didn't understand at first, but she went on explaining, that most of the cost of Sunset Estates was the machinery that took you and made you thinner at each of the doors you went through; that each door was a different setting, to make sure nobody went into the wrong slice of reality, which the machinery couldn't handle; that two people could never be in the same slice together unless each of them came from outside (they were different slices of the original apartment and so could never be brought together with ruining the separation of all the slices); and that for the same reason no mechanical signs, like television, could pass directly between one slice and another. That was why phone and TV reception were so bad. Mother said that the remaining mass of each person — the nineteen million, nine hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine parts that were not in use — was stored somewhere else in a huge barrel of metal and were — I mean was — inactive. I don't really understand how they managed people doing different things in the apartments — I mean in the one apartment — but she said they "synchronized" everyone at the end of every month so that anything you changed in that time (like sewing or things you moved or the food you used up) just changed back in the middle of the night. Until then it was a strain on the machinery to keep all the slices so different (Mother said, I think, "accommodate to different interstitial stresses") which is why a relative's visit was so terribly expensive for anyone at Sunset Estates. The retirees could occasionally make tapes and have them "solidified" by the machinery (to send outside, you see) or even "solidified" and then "attenuated" for another retiree, but that was rare. It was all very, very expensive. Everything was far too expensive except the apartment itself and the lovely grounds.

I said, "Then nobody sees anybody, ever!"

Mother said, "Except the Hallers. But *they* don't like to share. *They* are using up their funds and will have to leave very soon." She said this in a scornful voice, with her face all mean and pinched, not at all in the gracious and noble way she had been explaining things before. She said, "They're disgusting."

I kept thinking *The people are shaved thin, too.* But I couldn't feel it. The huge, heavy kitchen machinery was visible all around us behind its transparent plastic wall — one whole wall was for food and showed rank upon rank of frozen things and looked just like a factory — and it seemed to me that this was the machinery for slicing everything thin and that in a moment my presence would be too much for it and it would blow up or run down and twenty million other people would explode into the kitchen. It was as if we were inside one of those toys

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where you open a little figure only to find another, and so on, because they're all hollow. I imagined other apartments packed all around us like a nest of larger and larger boxes. It wouldn't have been so bad to think of the things being stretched thin, but the people, too—!

I said to my mother, "But I don't like it. There's something wrong with it. There must be!"

She said, "Then, Mary Ellen, you had better go home."

I said, shocked, "Something's happened to you!" and Mother said, "Nonsense! What a silly idea," but it was in that oh-so-bright voice she used years ago to say things were all right when they weren't. She told Michael and me that Father was dead in that voice. I wanted to stay but it was just then that a chime rang in the antique French porcelain clock on the dining room wall — I could see it from where I was in the kitchen — and Mother jumped to her feet, saying in the same too-bright voice, "Oh, how kind! They're warning you not to overstay your time," and then somehow she was rushing me through all those lovely rooms — though without touching me — crying brightly, "Don't phone; it can't get through, you know," and "Don't write, dear; they'll let you know if anything happens," and "Tell Michael how terribly happy I am!"

That's all. I never got to walk outside in the park among the hibiscus and the palmetto trees, though I'm sure that if I had, nothing would have had a proper smell, not even a green smell, even though they were real flowers, and all those lovely things felt — I don't know how to put it — funny, somehow. Dim. After all, something has to disappear when nineteen million nine hundred ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine parts of you are somwhere else, doesn't it?

And mother never even touched me.

Oh, I don't know what to think! I want her out of there, I do. But where is she to go when the only other place is a bunk in Happihomes or a nasty hallway with dirt all over the floor? That's what the "Hallers" are, you see, people who come out into the halls of Sunset estates to die because they can't stand to be alone; they think it will drive them mad, I suppose, being alone with most of themselves put away somewhere else. Or perhaps they've already been driven mad and can't find their way back to the right slice of reality. That's why Mother hates them, because they're real and dying with each other. And now I can't get messages through to that place where Mother is, where everything looks so splendid but when you touch it or smell it, it's a little dim or flat somehow. I can't keep her with me — there's hardly room in my apartment even for one — and I couldn't pay anything at all into my pension fund if I had to take care of her — Sunset Estates is cheaper than living on the outside, after all.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No, that's not my problem. She wouldn't come if I asked her. She was insulted by my so much as saying I didn't like Sunset Estates; I could never persuade her to come. Anyway, it's not really *my* problem, is it? Unless I sign up for Sunset Estates, too? Oh, you don't know how lovely it was! — ten rooms, the smallest at least twice the size of this one, and the huge library of television tapes, and music and books, and anything at all you wanted to eat, and that beautiful, beautiful park all for one's own, and somebody else to clean while you sleep — they do, you know, they store that last little slice of everyone for an hour in the middle of the night and a team of skilled people comes in to set everything to rights — and all of it so big and clean, so fresh and lovely. Maybe I'm wrong about the way things felt; maybe it was my imagination. It could have been, couldn't it? Or maybe the machinery is just a little bit overloaded with twenty million people. But they're going to have two apartments soon; they said so.

Maybe then it will be all right.

It's bad to be alone, of course, but is it worse when there's twenty million to a room and you don't see anyone else or like Endfun Acres where there are twenty old people jammed into one room and do you see them? And can't help smelling them too?

I don't know. I'm worried about my retirement. Last night I dreamed I was back in the kitchen of Sunset Estates and I asked my mother where my father was. She pointed at the floor, which became transparent, you know, and there he was, buried under the floor but looking as if he had been alive. I recognized his white moustache at once. Then all the walls became like glass and there were corpses buried all around us. We were surrounded by twenty million dead people who looked as if they were buried alive. *I woke up thinking At least I'll be near her.* I thought, *Every time I do anything I'll be able to think: Mother is doing this, too. We'll be so close together, in the same place, eating the same food, looking at the same television tapes, sitting on the same chairs, even though we can't touch.* Then this morning — I mean in reality, after I'd waked up — a brochure came in the mail.

It was from Sunset Estates....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy & Science Fiction

MARKET PLACE

BOOKS-MAGAZINES

S-F FANTASY MAGAZINES, BOOKS. Big 1982 catalog $1.00. Collections purchased (large or small). Robert Madle, 4406 Bestor Dr., Rockville, MD 20853.

PRIVATE COLLECTION for sale. Science fiction, fantasy and horror, hard bound, paper and mags. Write for book list. P. Badalamenti, 1 Crescent Terrace, Bellville, NJ 07109.

BACK ISSUES of Science Fiction and Fantasy magazines are our specialty. Send for free catalog. Overseas requests welcome. Also, highest prices paid for collections, large or small. Ray Bowman, Box 5845F, Toledo, Ohio 43613.

SOFT BOOKS, 89 Marion Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6R 1E6. Buy, Sell, Arkham's, Grant's, etc. Catalogues issued.

SEND 25¢ FOR CATALOG of Scientifantasy books & pulps. Canford, Drawer 216, Freeville, NY 13068.

60,000 SF and Mystery paperbacks, hardcovers, magazines in stock. Free catalogs. Box F-86A, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY Catalog. O-P 1st Edition Hardcovers and Pulps. les affiches illustrees, 23834 Wendover, Beachwood, OH 44122.

SCIENTIFANTASY SPECIALIST: Books, magazines. 20¢ stamp for catalog. Gerry de la Ree, Cedarwood, Saddle River, NJ 07458.

HAUNTING FICTION. MESMERIZING ART. The Horror Show. Sample issue: $1.50. Free information: Star Route 1, Box 151-T, Oak Run, CA 96069.

BOUGHT, SOLD, TRADED, SF&F 1st editions, pulps, digests. Send 2 stamps for 1982 gigantic 15,000 item catalog. Graham Holroyd, 778 Spencerport Rd., Rochester, NY 14606.

WEIRDBOOK, issue #16, $5. FREE CATALOG. Three nominations for World Fantasy Award. Box 149, Buffalo, NY 14226.

MOONSCAPE, A Magazine of Science Fiction, premiering this fall. Order now! $2.75, 4/$10.00. Moonscape, Box 1858, Swan River, Manitoba R0L 1Z0

SCIENCE FICTION-FANTASY-Mystery. Paperbacks-by-Mail. Send for free catalog. 3000 titles. Edward Mannison, Books-by-Mail, P.O. Box 3236, Seal Beach, CA 90740-2236.

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS — Highest prices paid! Fantasy Archives, 71 Eighth Ave., NYC 10014.

HARDCOVER SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY. Reasonable Prices. Free Lists. Norman Syms, 8 Broadmoor Vale, Upper Weston, Bath, Avon, England BA1 4LP.

FOREIGN EDITIONS OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. Copies of French, German, Spanish, Japanese and Swedish editions available at $2.50 each, three for $7.00. Mercury Press, Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753.

MAGICKAL NEWSPAPER of Wizardry and Shamanism. Free details. Circle, Box 9013-Z, Madison, WI 53715.

MOONSTONE BOOKCELLARS, INC. 2145 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20037. (202) 659-2600. Science Fiction, Fantasy and Mysteries.

Do you have something to advertise to sf readers? Books, magazines, typewriters, telescopes, computers, space-drives, or misc. Use the F&SF Market Place at these low, low rates: $7.50 for minimum of ten (10) words, plus 75 cents for each additional word. Frequency discount: 10% for six consecutive insertions, 15% for twelve consecutive insertions. Send copy and remittance to: Adv. Dept., Fantasy and Science Fiction, P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SPECULATIVE FICTION MISCELLANY: Annotated catalog. Write DMK BOOKS, 22946 Brenford, Woodland Hills, CA 91364.

THE LITERATURE OF FANTASY & Science Fiction is remarkably complete at The Science Fiction Shop, 56 Eighth Ave., NY, NY 10014. Worldwide mail-order. Catalogue mailing-list free US/Canada; $1.00 all other. Phone orders welcome. (212) 741-0270.

WANTED: SF First Editions. Marietta Corporation, POB 147, Marietta, PA 17547. Phone: (717) 426-1472.

FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS CREATED JESUS, authored Gospels. Positive proof, scholarly booklet: $3.00—Vector, Box 6215-B, Bellevue, WA 98007.

CLOTHING

F&SF T-SHIRTS. Navy blue with original magazine logo imprinted in white OR: Red shirt with blue logo. Sm, med, large, extra-large. $6.00 each. Mercury Press, Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753.

HEALTH

CONQUER HARMFUL ANGER 100 WAYS. Find Love, Health, Security! $2. Newlife, Box 684-AS, Boulder City, Nevada 89005.

HYPNOTISM

Hypnotism Revealed. Free illustrated details. Powers, 12015SF Sherman Road, North Hollywood, California 91605.

INSTRUCTION

LEARN TO PLAY the classic guitar in only one lifetime. Frederick Draper Guitarist. Student of Segovia (1964, 1966, 1981). Concerts at Carnegie Recital Hall (1976, 1978, 1981). Studios: Manhattan and Westchester. Call 914-241-0572.

SCIENTIFIC ASTROLOGICAL courses. Write Eternal Enterprises, Box 60913V, Sacramento, CA 95860.

MISCELLANEOUS

ESP LABORATORY. This new research service group can help you. For FREE information write: Al G. Manning, ESP Laboratory, 7559 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046.

PYRAMID PUZZLE SOLVED! $2 and large SASE. Kurosaka, 72 Newell, Auburndale, MA 02166.

FUTURE SPACE STATION with approaching Shuttle Craft by master S.F. artist ALEX SCHOMBURG, Analog S.F Jan. '78 COVER. Brilliantly detailed, full color photographic reporductions. 8x10 $14.95, w/mat $17.95. B&W sample catalog $1.50. Money back guarantee. Send check or money order to: Future Art, Dept. 1A, && Wynooski, Newberg, OR 97132.

UNICORN or SPACE SHUTTLE LIFTOFF rubberstamp on hardwood mount $5 postpaid. SASE for catalog. Stamping Ground, 616 S. Governor, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

NEW and IMPROVED catalog from APOGEE BOOKS. F&SF Cards, Stationary, Books, Games, Discounts. $1 to: Apogee Books, Dept. F, Interstate Mall, Altamonte Springs, FL 32701.

EXPLORE A NEW UNIVERSE — Play Universe III, the state-of-the-art computer-moderated correspondence game. Rulebook, and first 2 turns, just $7.00. Central Texas Computing, 710-F Southwest Tower, Austin, Texas 78701.

SUPER CHESS — Rules For New Game. Send $2.00, SASE to PO Box 3682, Stanford, CA 94305.

FREE BROCHURE. Cryonics Association, 24041 Stratford, Oak Park, MI 48237.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Meet that special person! Call DATELINE — free: 800-451-3245.

LONELY? Nationwide club for both sexes. Send stamp. Exciting, Box 324, Ontario, Calif. 91761.

EXOTIC ASIA GIRLS — individual introductions. Details, photos $2. Equator, Box 570311-KC, Miami, FLA 33157.

JAPANESE GIRLS make wonderful wives. Let us introduce you to an unspoiled Oriental beauty. $2 brings photos, descriptions, application. Japan International, Box 156-FSF, Carnelian Bay, CA 95711.

RECIPES

MOUTH WATERING California Sunshine Recipes. Orange meringue pie; Magnificent Orange Cake; Pineapple Dump Cake; Old-tyme hot water pie crust. All for $5.00. Send SASE to Lezah's Recipes, Box 86063, San Diego, CA 92138.

RECORDS/TAPES

GREAT SF RADIO PROGRAMS. Free list cassettes. Rare Radio, Dept. F, Box 117, Sunland, Calif. 91040.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS RATES

THE MAGAZINE OF **Fantasy & Science Fiction**

$15.00 for the first one-year subscription (your own or gift)

$10.00 for each additional one-year subscription

Send Fantasy and Science Fiction as a Christmas gift:

(PLEASE PRINT)

To _____
Name of Recipient

Street _____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

(PLEASE PRINT)

To _____
Name of Recipient

Street _____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

11-82

☐ I enclose $_____

☐ Bill me after Christmas

Enter my own subscription

☐ New

☐ Renewal

Foreign and Canadian postage: $2.00 per year.

My name_____

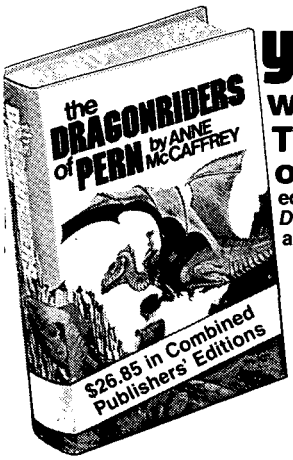
Street _____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Mercury Press, Inc.
P.O. Box 56
Cornwall, Ct. 06753

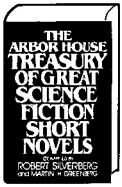
Gift cards will be sent to you, for you to personalize with your own signature.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



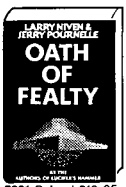
YOURS FREE with membership The DRAGONRIDERS of PERN

One mammoth edition including all 3 novels: *Dragonflight, Dragonquest,* and *The White Dragon.*



9076 Pub.ed.$19.95

9159 Spec.ed.



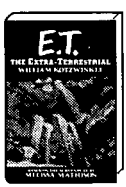
7021 Pub.ed.$13.95

5116 Pub.ed.$14.95

0463 Spec.ed.

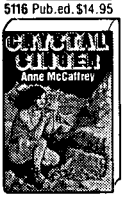
1891 Pub.ed.$15.95

0174 Pub.ed.$17.50

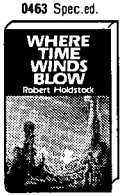


0927 Pub.ed.$12.95

*6510 Pub.ed.$12.95



8938 Spec.ed.



*5660 Spec.ed.

0497 Nonfiction. Pub.ed.$14.95

And take any 4 for $1 WITH MEMBERSHIP

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SELECTIONS.

*Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.
Note: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices.

How the Club works:

When your application for membership is accepted, you'll receive your choice of any 4 books for only $1 (plus shipping and handling) and a free copy of *The Dragonriders of Pern.* You may examine the 4 books in your home and, if not completely satisfied, return them within 10 days—membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing. The free book is yours to keep in any case.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come,* describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. In addition, up to 4 times a year you may receive offers of special Selections, always at low Club prices. If you want the 2 Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically.

If you don't want a Selection, prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it to us by the date specified.

We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter or continue to enjoy Club benefits for as long as you wish. One of the 2 Selections each month is only $3.98. Other Selections are higher, but always much less than hardcover publishers' editions—up to 65% off! A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money now, but do mail the coupon today!

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB

Dept. FR-249, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

Please accept my application for membership. Send me the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below plus my FREE book and bill me just $1 (plus shipping and handling). I agree to the Club Plan as described in this ad. I will take 4 more books at regular low Club prices during the coming year and may resign any time thereafter. The FREE book will be mine to keep whether or not I remain a member. SFBC offers serious works for mature readers.

FREE BOOK	1.	2.	3.	4.

Mr.
Ms. _____
(Please print)

Address _____ Apt. # _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

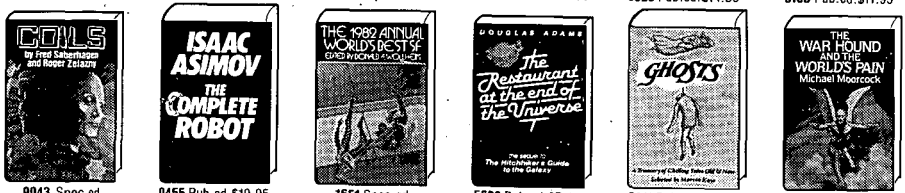
If under 18, parent must sign. _____

The Science Fiction Book Club offers complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Canada. Offer slightly different in Canada.

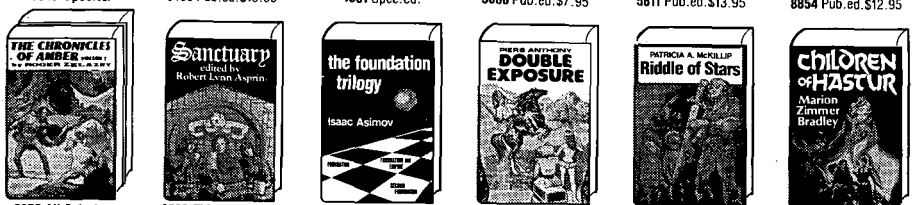
25-S233 B

LICENSED TO MOE'S
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1750 Pub.ed.$12.95 | **2006** Pub.ed.$12.50 | **8748** Spec.ed. | ***7955** Pub.ed.$12.95 | **0828** Pub.ed.$14.50 | **0158** Pub.ed.$11.95



9043 Spec.ed. | **0455** Pub.ed.$19.95 | **1651** Spec.ed. | **5686** Pub.ed.$7.95 | **5611** Pub.ed.$13.95 | **8854** Pub.ed.$12.95



0075 All 5 Amber novels. 2 vols. Comb.pub.ed. $32.30

0539 Thieves' World; Tales from the Vulgar Unicorn; Shadows of Sanctuary. Spec.ed.

6221 Comb.pub.ed. $23.85

5637 Split Infinity; Blue Adept; Juxtaposition. Comb.pub.ed.$34.40

6197 The Riddle-Master of Hed; Heir of Sea and Fire; Harpist in the Wind. Comb.pub.ed.$24.85

6833 The Heritage of Hastur; Sharra's Exile. Spec.ed.

AND TAKE ANY 4 FOR $1

WITH MEMBERSHIP

See other side for coupon and additional Selections.

THE SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB

25-S233 B

Note: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices.

***Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED